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A Game of Confidence: Literary Dialect, Linguistics, and Authenticity

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A Game of Confidence: Literary Dialect, Linguistics, and Authenticity

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To my family and in memory of Maj. Samuel C. Leigh, USMC.

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A Game of Confidence: Literary Dialect, Linguistics, and Authenticity

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A Game of Confidence: Literary Dialect, Linguistics, and Authenticity builds a bridge between literary-critical and linguistic approaches to representations of nonstandard speech in literature. Important scholarship both in linguistics and in literary criticism has sought to develop rigorous inquiry into deviations from standard written language to represent features of nonstandard spoken language in literature. I argue that neither field, however, has fully embraced the idea that, by definition, 'literary dialect' necessitates an interdisciplinary approach. Furthermore, neither has successfully integrated the other's very different theories and methods. As a result, 'literary dialect' provides an exciting opportunity for new scholarship connecting recent developments in literary history, sociolinguistics, and digital humanities. The goals of my project are two-fold: First, to analyze within their own cultural and historical contexts previous attempts by authors, readers, and scholars to fix the supposedly empirical accuracy of literary dialect representations; second, to model what I take to be an empirically more valid use of linguistics for analyzing literary artists' representations of nonstandard speech. My work provides a necessary intervention for literary dialect criticism, particularly for the

many arguments that have sought a degree of objectivity for assertions about the artistic or socio-political merits of a dialect text based on vague linguistic generalizations. My dissertation's primary focus is on the period that has served historically as the locus classicus for scholarship on American dialect literature: The second half of the nineteenth century when local colorists, regionalists, and realists used 'real' American voices as the foundation for a realistic American literature. By analyzing the production and historical reception of literary dialect texts from this period I show how assessments of 'authenticity' have been a constant in the critical response to these texts for nearly a century and a half. Having underscored the critical problems inherent in linking artistic and political evaluations of dialect texts to the 'authenticity' of their literary dialects, I then draw on recent developments in the digital humanities, computational linguistics, and sociolinguistics to employ a methodology for generating and interpreting literary-linguistic data on literary dialects.

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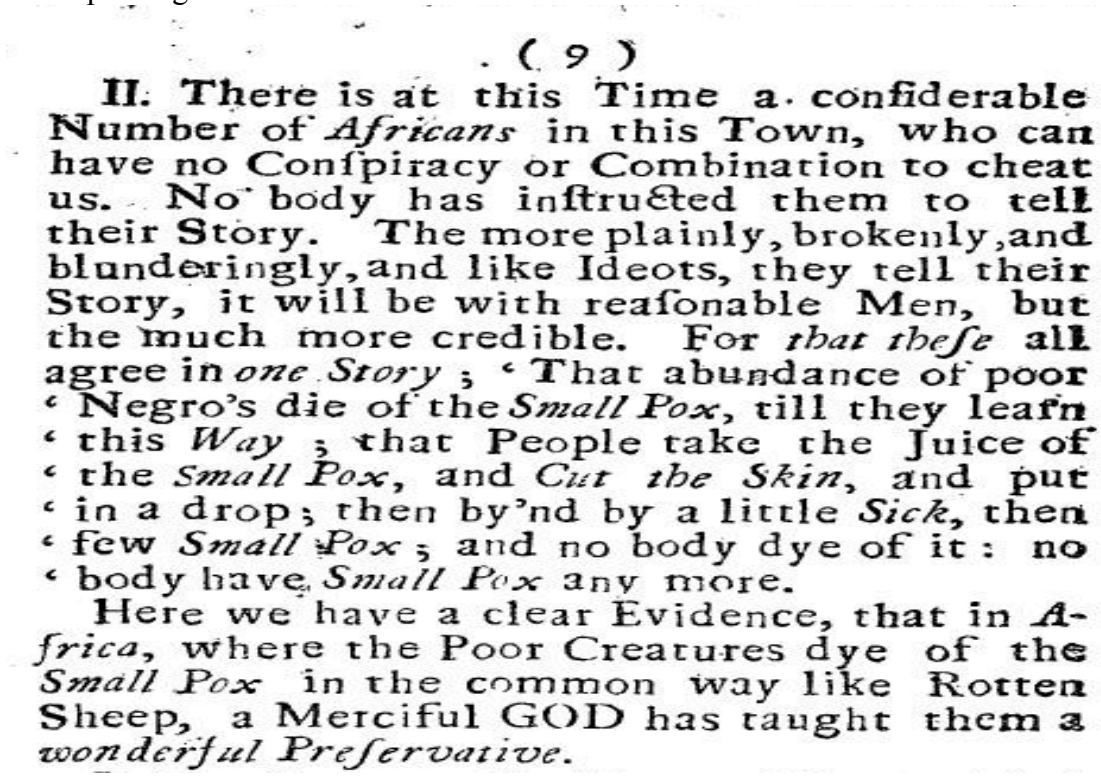
Introduction

INTRODUCTION: THE USES OF (IN)AUTHENTICITY

In 1721, the city of Boston was in a panic about a smallpox epidemic that affected 5,889 people, killing 844. However, the eventual solution to the problem, inoculation, drew lines between Boston's medical and religious leaders. The positions for and against inoculation found prominent representatives in the Reverend Cotton Mather and the physician William Douglass, respectively. The Harvard library's open collection program, "Contagion: Historical Views on Diseases and Epidemics," from which I have gathered the information above, describes the influences on Mather's case for inoculation: "Mather had learned about the procedure from the Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society and from one of his slaves." While the document in which Mather discusses the sources that convinced him that inoculation was not only lawful but a gift from God, "Some Account of What is Said of Inoculating or Transplanting the Small Pox by the Learned Dr. Emanuel Timonius, and Jacobus Pylarinus With Some Remarks thereon to which are added a Few Queries in Answer to the Scruples of many about the Lawfulness of this Method," certainly belongs in a collection dedicated to texts on diseases and epidemics, the way that Mather introduces and quotes his slaves also suggests that we consider it in another collection of texts: Those that draw lines between linguistic communities by representing vernacular speech with "nonstandard" writing.[1] I

[1] Throughout this dissertation I use the adjective "nonstandard" to describe the written representations of speech that deviate from conventional orthographic and grammatical rules. I do not, in doing so, wish to engage the debate among sociolinguists over the proper terms for describing spoken dialects defined by the presence of socially stigmatized linguistic structures. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes state that "other researchers may refer to these vernacular varieties as nonstandard dialects or nonmainstream dialects, but we have chosen to use the term *vernacular* because it seems more neutral than these alternatives" (14). As will become apparent, my dissertation is very interested in maintaining a distinction between the terms we use to describe spoken vernaculars and the written efforts of authors to suggest these vernaculars on the page using nonstandard orthographic and grammatical features.

begin this dissertation's exploration of the literary, political, and cultural lines that "literary dialects" have drawn in American literature and in American literary criticism by presenting the passage in which Mather explains what he learned from his slaves as the earliest example I can find of an author "nonstandardizing" his writing in order to mark speaking "others":



(9)

II. There is at this Time a conſiderable Number of *Africans* in this Town, who can have no Conſpiracy or Combination to cheat us. No body has inſtructed them to tell their Story. The more plainly, brokenly, and blunderingly, and like Ideots, they tell their Story, it will be with reaſonable Men, but the much more credible. For *that theſe* all agree in *one Story*; 'That abundance of poor 'Negro's die of the *Small Pox*, till they learn 'this *Way*; that People take the Juice of 'the *Small Pox*, and *Cut the Skin*, and put 'in a drop; then by'nd by a little *Sick*, then 'few *Small Pox*; and no body dye of it: no 'body have *Small Pox* any more.

Here we have a clear Evidence, that in *Africa*, where the Poor Creatures dye of the *Small Pox* in the common way like Rotten Sheep, a Merciful GOD has taught them a *wonderful Preſervative*.

Any passage of literary dialect like this presents two major questions for a critic: What *is* this literary dialect and what does this literary dialect *do*? Another way to ask this is, "What are the textual features that alert us to the fact that we are reading a literary dialect and what are the contextual implications of the author's use of such features?" In his landmark study of American dialect literature from the Gilded Age, Gavin Jones offers a very useful explication of the relationship between text and context, between what literary dialects *are* and what they *do*:

> Dialect texts are easily identifiable by their techniques of representing the phonetics of unfamiliar speech. On a deeper level, dialect writing is defined by a strong thematic interest in the cultural and political issues surrounding questions of linguistic variety. (2)[2]

If we ask what constitutes literary dialect in this passage—that is, what Mather does to let us know that we are reading "nonstandard" English—we can identify a few salient features. First the quotation marks suggest a difference between Mather's language and the language he ascribes to the "Africans" in Boston. Second, Mather employs a colloquial expression—'by 'nd by.' Third, Mather alters the standard orthographic representation of this expression by eliding the *a* in *and.* Fourth, Mather alters the grammar by stripping away parts of speech that normally make up English clauses: "by'nd by a little *Sick*, then few *Small Pox*."

Now that we've identified, described, and categorized what Mather's literary dialect *is*, we can begin to move to questions about what it *does* on a deeper, political and cultural level. Perhaps the most obvious thing that literary dialects such as Mather's do is to draw what Kenneth Lynn called a *cordon sanitaire* between the erudite narrator's language and the "plain, broken, and blundering language" of the Africans he quotes. This observation is strengthened by the fact that Mather's own writing in this document does not employ any orthographic elisions or grammatical errata of the kind ascribed to the slave's speech. Given that Mather's piece is entitled, "Some account of what is said of inoculating or transplanting the small pox. By the learned Dr. Emanuel Timonius, and Jacobus Pylarinus, With some remarks thereon…" we can also conjecture on how literary dialects draw lines between different "characters" or "voices" in the same text. In

[2] Jones's emphasis on the "phonetics of unfamiliar speech" reveals a key consideration that will reveal itself below and in the chapters that follow: the tendency for scholars of literary dialect to treat nonstandard orthographic features of literary dialect representations as more salient than nonstandard grammatical features. While I address Mather's grammatical decisions here and I refer to studies that treat grammar and orthography equally, much of what follows will address criticism that founds its questions on the relationship between spellings and sounds.

referring to the theories and experiences of Timonius and Pylarinus, Mather uses no quotation marks, no orthographic elisions, and no discernible grammatical deviations from his own written language conventions in the rest of the essay, thereby suggesting solidarity with the "lettered" men and difference from the orality of the slaves.

This passage suggests that Mather is asserting a class-based, racial, and geographic hierarchy in which educated, white men of Boston are superior to the ignorant "Africans" they have enslaved. The use of literary dialect here gives Mather the double advantage of drawing on the wisdom of the Africans' experience while disowning and defining himself in opposition to the ignorance and vulgarity with which it is expressed. We might also notice how all the Africans speak with one voice for Mather, which reflects the dehumanization inherent in the institution of slavery. Mather is also able to turn the traumatic experiences of smallpox victims into an affirmation of the dominant religious order, suggesting that God's greatness and benevolence has been written in the suffering of infidels. Furthermore, we might note the irony of the masters in all their wisdom needing to invoke the ignorance of their slaves in order to convince one another of the efficacy of a life-saving medical procedure. This latter observation suggests that literary dialects have a way of destabilizing and rewriting the cultural divisions that their authors often try so hard to stabilize by employing dialect writing in the first place.

I offer this reading as an example of the kind of interpretations that many critics make about literary dialects. Jones suggests that literary dialects are "easily identifiable" on the page. The ease with which nonstandard features are identified on the page seems also to be an invitation to an easy inevitability for their cultural and political interpretation. In this dissertation, however, I suggest that the ease with which critics have identified, described, and categorized textual features and used those textual features for support in arguments about the political valences of dialect texts obscures the

inherent methodological and theoretical issues that should confront scholars of these texts. I provide a number of critiques of exemplary statements on literary dialect from scholars such as Hazel Carby, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Shelley Fisher Fishkin, and Lisa Minnick below in order to illustrate the deleterious effects that not confronting the methodological and theoretical issues posed by dialect writing has had on our literary histories, our cultural critiques of what literary dialect *does*, and our efforts to bring linguistic analysis into our critical conversations. First, however, I critique my own reading of Mather to illustrate how quickly open-ended questions of method and theory can proliferate and destabilize even what appear to be the most straightforward analyses of dialect writing.

I have said that one of the salient textual features of Mather's literary dialect is a colloquialism, "by 'nd by." If I am honest about how I know that this is a colloquialism, though, I have to confess that I know not because of my familiarity with early-eighteenth-century English in America, but because I have read a number of literary dialect texts from the late nineteenth century. In fact, Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* uses the expression "by and by" 78 times.[3] Joel Chandler Harris in his *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings* uses the variant "bimeby" 100 times. I make this point to suggest that even our best efforts to identify and categorize what literary dialects *are*, that is, the features that let us know we are reading nonstandard writing, are often guided by assumptions we've developed anachronistically. Similarly, I have placed weight on the typographical decision to use quotation marks in Mather's essay. Again, I *feel* that these markers set up a *cordon sanitaire*, but I have no idea how Mather employs quotation

[3] We might be tempted to hypothesize about the continuity in representations of black speech from Mather to Twain and presume that Twain's "by and by"s are spoken by Jim, but the vast majority appear in Huck's narration, not in quoted speech.

marks in his long publishing career.[4] I also do not know if Mather used orthographic elisions in his other texts, and I don't know if the "error" I want to ascribe to his conjugation of "no body have" represents a blunder for Mather or if it is a conjugation that he uses often himself. My point is that this is knowledge I should seek out before extending my *cordon sanitaire* argument beyond my own situated response to this text. If my efforts should fail, I will have left behind a useful case study on the current limitations facing scholars of dialect writing. One of these limitations would surely reveal itself in the tools available to us for, say, tracing all of Mather's uses of quotation marks. Given the difficulty of getting reliable digital versions of texts from before the 1800s because of limitations in OCR software, the kind of study I would need in order to make these inquiries would prove incredibly time consuming and distract me from what I would really want to talk about if I wanted to extend this study: The amazing rhetorical maneuver that Mather pulls off by suggesting that idiocy reveals itself in poor English and, at the same time, that poor English proves artless reliability.

Mather's text also forces us to consider how literary lines dividing standard and nonstandard writing reflect and inform cultural and political lines between social categories such as race. While scholarship on the processes of racialization that occurred in America after the Civil War by Michael Elliott, Brad Evans, and others has established precedents for how we talk about literary dialect and literature's role in naturalizing divisions between races, what racialized literary dialect *does* in the socio-political climate of 1721 is harder to ascertain.[5] Clearly Mather's essay is relevant to the work of scholars

[4] This observation opens new questions about the historical use of quotation marks as indicators of direct speech quotation. More work remains to be done on how the typographic history of the quotation marks informs the history of literary dialect writing.

[5] The shift from talking about "race" toward talking about the social processes and literary representations that "racialized" minority groups in America is a recent and welcome shift in our critical discourse. In the *MLA International Bibliography*, all 58 articles produced by a search for "racialization" were published after the year 2000. For wide-ranging discussions on racialization, see *PMLA* (123.5).

such as Joanna Brooks, Philip Gould, and David Kazanjian who have worked to historicize race in colonial publications,[6] though we might ask how to orient Mather's remarkable and unprecedented use of nonstandard written language within quotation marks in 1721 within this scholarly tradition. That is, is Mather's participation in racialization inscribed in his literary dialect? Do his dialect representations contribute less, the same, or more to our judgment of his racial politics than do his disparaging comments on the Africans that appear before and after the quoted section? While it is true that Mather has deliberately broken and blundered the speech of Africans on the page compared to his written standards, the passage within the quotation marks raises as many questions about the standardization of the English language, book-making practices, and typography as it does about the relationship between nonstandard orthographies and grammars in the text and contextual processes of racialization. My point here is that I am fully qualified to answer the question of what Mather's literary dialect is and what it does for me, in my own situated moment of reading as a scholar trained in American cultural criticism and sociolinguistics: his efforts to justify his attitudes about the Africans' inferiority by pointing out deficiencies in their speech is reprehensible and linguistically deceitful. When I want to take my interpretation beyond my own response, however, I must be very careful to delineate the limits of what I know and what can be known about the period, the author, and the text. While this lesson is clear in the case of a literary dialect outlier like Mather's essay on inoculation, I will show that such caution can also help to enrich and challenge many of our most commonly held assumptions about the relationship between nineteenth-century texts and the socio-political lines that they helped to draw.

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[6] See *Early American Literature* 41.2 (2006) for a roundtable discussion including statements from each of these scholars.

On a larger scale, we might ask why a text like Mather's, which clearly employs nonstandard orthographic and grammatical features to mark speaking others on the page, has not been included in our histories of American dialect writing? Jones has suggested that literary dialects are easily identifiable on the page; I ask, however, on what pages have we looked for them? What has been lost by narrowing our field of vision to a specific set of texts in a specific set of genres from a specific period? What is to be gained by breaking down the conventional barriers drawn between dialect texts, genres, and periods and seeking new contexts in which we might read nonstandard orthographies and grammars? In the chapters that follow I provide a number of readings of literary dialect texts and modern critical reactions to them that illuminate the need for a more inclusive history of literary dialect writing in this country and a more precise set of methods for identifying and analyzing literary dialect features.

These considerations may seem to take us down a path to critical nihilism: If we can't know everything, we can't know anything. I hope in what follows to show that I advocate quite the opposite position. I do this by trying to shift the framework of what we are talking about when we talk about literary dialects. As I will show in the chapters that follow, most histories of literary dialects are not the histories of literary dialects but the histories of the assumptions we've brought to them, the tools we've used to describe them, and the contexts we've built for them. When we embrace this idea, we can then begin to take a look at our assumptions and ask if they hinder or enable our inquiries. We can look at our tools and ask if they are adequate, and we can look at our contexts and ask if they are the best or the only ones. It is only after such reflection that we can properly address considerations of what literary dialects *are* and what they *do* and push our research in new directions.

AUTHENTICITY, LITERARY HISTORY, AND CULTURAL CRITICISM

These new directions, however, require us to draw on the assumptions, tools, and contexts developed within a range of scholarly traditions, all of which are relevant in one way or another to the challenge of describing and interpreting literary dialect representations. These traditions include textual studies, literary history, cultural criticism, computational linguistics, sociolinguisitcs, and digital humanities. Because each of these fields has a valid purchase on the questions raised by nonstandard orthographies and grammars such as Mather's, critics of literary dialects must, then, be prepared for and even embrace moments when the assumptions, tools, and contexts from one field of inquiry challenge and even contradict those of another. I make this point by setting the open-ended questions I argue we should be asking of literary dialect texts against the question that critics have all too frequently and unproductively tried to answer for dialect texts: "Is Mather's representation of the Africans' speech authentic?" I challenge the usefulness of this question in my look at Mather, but I will show that supposed answers to this ultimately unanswerable question have been used to satisfy an enormous range of critical desires in our literary histories and cultural criticism. Roman Jakobson has argued that "verisimilitude in a verbal expression or in a literary description obviously makes no sense whatever." Jakobson's point about the essentially conventional nature of determinations of literary verisimilitude should cast doubt on any attempt to evaluate how authentic literary dialect representations can be. This general theoretical stance has, at times, also revealed itself in some of our major statements on literary dialect. Consider the following comment in the "Dialect" entry from the *Cambridge Companion to Mark Twain*:

> But perhaps it is not possible to reveal sound through English orthography, because with no standard dialect to use as a basis for pronunciation, there is no regularly accepted correspondence between letters and sounds. Hence, any

> representation of American dialects requires the imagination of the reader as much as it requires the ear of the writer. (166-7)

I show that literary histories which attempt to delineate differences between literary dialect texts, genres, and periods based on authorial interest and skill in authentic representation of speech have not realized the constitutive role their own imaginations have played in the drawing of those lines. Nor have they, as I will show in my first two chapters, explored the way in which writers and readers have jockeyed to obtain the necessary authority to adjudicate authenticity of representation in paratextual material such as prefaces.

That authenticity of representation has often provided the linchpin for categorizing literary dialect texts both generically and periodically is clear in Lisa Minnick's sketch of early American dialect writing:

> By the nineteenth century, dialect began to appear more frequently in works by American authors after a few eighteenth-century forays into dialect representation, especially in novels and plays with colonial themes as well as in travel writing by Europeans exploring the colonies. The inception and growth of literary dialect as a significant tradition in the United States is usually identified with the nineteenth century and as a component of humorous writing. In the United States, the earliest publications of works within this dialect tradition occurred before the Civil War…By the 1830s, American dialect humor was well established. In fact, Walter Blair cites 1830 as the date that "American humor became a recognizable phenomenon" (xi). Prior to that decade, Blair adds, few American writers showed much interest or ability in trying to demonstrate 'authentic popular speech' (xxiv). (3-4)

I quote Minnick here to prove two points. The first is that our literary histories of dialect writing have often been built on distinctions between texts that we have presumed to be interested in and capable of producing authentic speech in writing. The second is that our current literary histories of dialect writing often repeat the assumptions of those, like Blair, who have gone before. We have, I will show, been telling and retelling the same histories about the development of dialect writing in America, and as a result a certain

amount of critical stagnation has set in. The flaws in our conventional literary histories are revealed by the fact that they provide no context in which to understand a text like Mather's, which is neither a colonial novel or play nor a nineteenth-century humor tale. Sociolinguist Alexandra Jaffe's point that "orthography selects, displays, and naturalizes linguistic difference which in turn is used to legitimize and naturalize cultural and political boundaries" (502-3), should cause us to be skeptical of our tendency to relegate some texts to pre-historical status based on a lack of skill or interest in representing speech authentically. Even if "authenticity" could be objectively proven, wouldn't nonstandard orthographies from oblivious and incapable authors have equal potential to naturalize the cultural and political lines Jaffe identifies? Given that the first dialect text Minnick analyzes in her book is Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, we might also wonder which other texts have been lost in the authenticity shuffle between 1830 and 1884.

A critique that suggests that many of our conclusions about literary dialects are imaginary is playing a high stakes game with our literary-historical and cultural-critical traditions. I hope to blunt the polemical possibilities of such an argument by suggesting that literary historians and cultural critics are not doing themselves and their valuable work any favors when they resort to qualitative evaluations of "good" and "bad" literary dialects. I hope to open doors for stronger and more engaging statements about what literary dialects have been and what they have done that will enrich the work of literary historians and cultural critics. Am I suggesting that there are, in fact, no differences between "vulgar" antebellum humor texts and the work of late-nineteenth-century local colorists who thought of themselves as ethnographers and folklorists? No. I am suggesting that as long as we have used "authenticity" as our quotient for analysis of literary dialect representations, we have not yet allowed the textual features constituting

these texts' literary dialects to contribute to our sense that these texts belong in different literary categories. Am I suggesting that Thomas Nelson Page's literary dialect is no different from Charles Chesnutt's? No. I am suggesting that as long as we assume that one is authentic, sympathetic, and subversive and the other is inauthentic, stereotypical, and hegemonic before we begin identifying, describing, and categorizing each author's techniques, we have hurt our ability to use dialect features as support in our arguments about the racial politics inherent in representing vernacular dialects in literature.

I used Mather's representations of African speech for my model readings and I bring up Chesnutt and Page above because the issue of representation of African American speech in American literature has been persistently and justifiably central to questions about what an author's dialect techniques have to do with cultural and political themes. Below, however, I provide examples of how a belief in a demonstrable textual "authenticity" has thwarted even our foremost critics' efforts to show how race has been constructed linguistically within literature. Hazel Carby and Henry Louis Gates Jr. both offer readings of the nonstandard orthography in Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's representations of black speech in *Iola Leroy*. While Gates argues that "*Iola Leroy* contains the richest and fullest representation of black dialect to be found in the nineteenth century novel" (xiv), Carby asserts that "the language Harper invented for [folk speakers] was based on an authorial sense of error and deviation from an assumed norm; it was not an attempt to describe the inherent qualities, cadence, and tone of the freedman's speech" (78). How can one critic suggest that Harper has presented the richest and fullest representations—note Gates's confidence in his use of superlatives—and another suggest that the author *invented* her black literary dialect and didn't even try to make it rich or full? Is one right and the other wrong? How can we adjudicate between them? What textual features could we reference to settle this debate? If Gates wants to

show that Harper does something different and better than other writers of black speech in the late nineteenth century, he creates an immense set of methodological and theoretical hurdles to clear that should involve a close look at the techniques that Harper employs next to the techniques of her contemporaries. In the absence of such evidence, we must accept that Gates's and Carby's evaluations of the authenticity of Harper's dialect representations do not reveal textual properties, but that they are imagined in the situated moments of their reading. They, in fact, say more about the kinds of things that literary dialect does to its readers than about what it does in its contextual moment of publication.

Even more suggestive and perhaps unsettling are the ways in which impressionistic statements like Gates's and Carby's, stated as objective fact, reverberate in critical works that cite them. That is, if Carby does not support what she means by an "invented" language by a closer look at the techniques Harper employs, how reliable is her interpretation for scholars coming afterward? Gabrielle Foreman confronts Carby's conclusions that Harper's dialect was poorly written in an essay that identifies a politically subversive *heterglossia* in Harper's dialect representations. Aware that Carby's conclusions about the poor quality of Harper's dialect seem to challenge her own conclusions about *Iola Leroy*, Foreman offers a rather odd footnote, asserting that "in the introduction to *Iola Leroy* Carby aptly revises her earlier contention that 'Harper placed in the mouths of her folk characters a poorly written dialect that was intended to indicate their 'illiteracy.'" Presumably, Foreman is suggesting that Carby realized her mistake in her assessment of Harper's representations of "folk" speech, yet the introduction to which Foreman refers does no such thing. Carby says again in her introduction to *Iola Leroy*, published the same year as *Reconstructing Womanhood*, "'The folk' are signaled through the use of dialect and, though Harper's construction of this dialect is poor, her representation is a marginal improvement over Brown's portrayal of the folk as buffoons

in *Clotel*." (xix) The problem this exchange reveals is that what we want to say about literary dialects has often superseded our ability to think first about what we can say and even make it difficult to hear one another's impressions on the topic. As long as analyses of literary dialects assume the possibility that some dialects are objectively and demonstrably better at getting at the "real" than others, we are left with critical stalemates in which new analyses cannot engage those that came before.

It is important to acknowledge that dialect writing has a long history of prompting strong reactions from readers and these reactions can often be very insightful and illuminating. That is what makes Toni Morrison's reading of Edgar Allan Poe's infamous story, "The Gold Bug," in which Jupiter is berated by Legrand as an "infernal black villain!" because he does not know his left eye from his right, so compelling:

> I, for example, might read The Gold Bug and watch his efforts to render my grandfather's speech to something as close to braying as possible, an effort so intense you can see the perspiration—and the stupidity—when Jupiter says "I knows," and Mr. Poe spells the verb "nose." (qtd. in Fishkin 95)

What Morrison does here is to make her reading of Jupiter's speech her own, grounded in her experiences and her expectations, and the reading of the pun here is brilliant. What Morrison does not do, however, is what Gates and Carby have both done: make their readings of literary dialects not their own, but pronouncements about some objective, essential aspect of the nonstandard orthographies themselves. In doing so, I argue, they have impeded rather than advanced the immense potential for analysis of how the lines that literary dialects draw on the page between standard and nonstandard writing map onto the lines drawn between races, ethnicities, and classes on the cultural and political landscapes of their publication.

I argue that the way out of these stalemates, beyond acknowledging, as Morrison admirably does, that our readings are our own and say as much about us as they do about

the text, is to embrace the idea that the path from text to context does not go through consideration of some unrecoverable "real" speech but through other texts. That is, there is no context for a literary dialect except the one we construct using other texts. We can see the clarifying role that intertexts play in analysis of literary dialect by revisiting Mather's essay on inoculation. If we assume that Timonius's and Pylarinus's accounts and the Africans' account are all "texts" on the inoculation of smallpox, we can conjecture on how representations of dialect point toward divisions that can be drawn not only between narrators and dialect "characters" within a text but also between and among different kinds of texts.[7] The typographic markers, the orthographic elisions, and the grammatical reductions suggest to us that the Africans' account is a different kind of smallpox text. Mather reinforces these generic differences in the way he introduces each text. Mather tells us that Dr. Timonius is "a renowned fellow at the royal society of London," that Pylarinus, while not a doctor, is "an eminent person" and "Consul at Smyrna," and that the Africans are "Ideots" too dumb for guile. In the case of the first two, their credentials increase the validity of their statement; in the third, the lack of credentials accomplishes the same thing by suggesting artlessness. Intertextually, then, it becomes clear that literary dialects present different avenues for transmitting information. Ignorance, which reveals itself in plain, broken, and blundering language, becomes another kind of authority for Mather, who seems to espouse the (still politically current) idea that common sense is best expressed in common speech. We should also note that while Timonius's letter is presented directly in an abridged form, Pylarinus's account is told by Mather in third person, and the Africans' tale is, as we've seen, told in direct speech. Three different kinds of smallpox texts are set apart by the nature of the authority

[7] This reading requires that we think of Mather as an editor who has drawn together and made some notes on three different texts rather than as an author/narrator who has introduced us to three different characters.

ascribed to their authors and in the ways they are presented as "texts." These observations promote a greater degree of confidence in the conclusions I reach about what Mather's dialect writing reveals about him, his allegiances, his text, and his cultural moment.[8] Furthermore, when we acknowledge that the contexts we use for consideration of the textual features of literary dialects are of our own making, what is to prevent us from, for example, looking at Mather's use of "by 'nd by" next to Twain's?

The importance of finding intertexts to support our analyses of dialect texts—indeed acknowledging that we must do so if we are to get at productive readings that extend beyond our impressionistic responses to the techniques employed by an author—is underscored in Shelley Fisher Fishkin's *Was Huck Black?* Fishkin argues that Mark Twain's earlier sketches including representations of black speech are strikingly similar to Huck Finn's own speech in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The question she asks in her title, however, might more accurately have been, "Was Huck black for Mark Twain?" Or, more radically, "Who might Huck have been?" That is, Fishkin's source text for black speech against which she compares Huck's speech was also written by Twain, and therefore she is comparing what Huck is on the page to what was "black" for Twain on the page. Fishkin's comparison makes a major contribution to Twain studies by identifying valuable and overlooked intertexts for *Huck Finn*, but it does not, it cannot, answer the titular question that Fishkin asks. Too often, literary critics have founded the conclusions they reach about literary dialect texts on a belief that there is some "real speech" out there—or, in this case, some "real black," revealed in some "real speech"—

[8] Of course, I have pulled double duty on the letters of Dr. Timonius and Pylarinus. I've used them both as "characters" that Mather includes in his text and as separate texts that I can compare to one another. While I do so to prove a point about the different kinds of questions that dialects can pose within and among texts, I have elided Mather's role as author/editor for my own purposes when I do so. I am not reading Timonius or Pylarinus, or "hearing" the speech of the Africans; rather I am reading Mather presenting these characters or texts to me. This consideration suggests that literary dialect texts and the ways we respond to them are deeply intertwined with how they are presented to us paratextually.

against which dialect texts can be tested without considering first that even their sources for the "real" are, themselves, unstable dialect texts that deserve their own textual and intertextual scrutiny. Indeed, we must consider the degree to which the questions we've asked of literary dialect, like Fishkin's, demand binary answers.

AUTHENTICITY AND LINGUISTICS

This drive to ask and answer questions that produce merely "yes/no" answers has bedeviled another aspect of how critics have approached literary dialects: the role that linguistics might play in how we discuss literary dialect. It has long been assumed that linguistic studies into language variation can benefit our literary-critical responses to dialect writing. A number of critics have pointed out that Fishkin's analysis is insufficiently linguistic. Jonathan Arac makes a particularly strong challenge to Fishkin's methods, claiming that "Fishkin did not understand her linguistic authorities" over eight pages of biting criticism in a section entitled "The Trouble with Fishkin's Linguistics" (186-194). But even critics whose engagement with relevant linguistic research is more comprehensive than Fishkin's are vexed by an assumption that many sociolinguists interested in the inherently selective and therefore political nature of all written transcriptions of speech would question. The assumption is that linguists are capable of recovering a stable feature list for a "real" historical dialect in a way that would allow literary critics to make reliable judgments about the accuracy or authenticity of dialect features they find in literary texts.

There is a long tradition of assuming that linguistics offers the keys to better analysis of literary dialect based on systematic comparisons of the literary dialect to the "real" speech and that linguistic failures such as Fishkin's merely call for more systematic use of linguistics. Lisa Minnick has made this point recently, arguing that "comparison of

the literary speech data with the data of real speakers provides a basis for evaluation of the literary data" (44). If, Minnick's logic goes, we can compare the literary dialect data against "real" dialect data, then we can evaluate the authenticity of a dialect representation. In turn, then, we can use that evaluation of authenticity to draw conclusions about whether an author's or text's dialect representations reinforce or subvert whatever social hierarchies seem most relevant to us. If a representation of literary dialect is judged to correlate with the real speech of a marginalized group, we have support for claims that it treats speaking others fairly, or sympathetically, or even empowers them with counter-hegemonic voices. If, on the other hand, a text does not achieve authenticity in its dialect representations when compared to the "real" data, we have support for claims that it treats speaking others unfairly, stereotypically, and co-opts the voice of a marginalized speech community for hegemonic purposes.

Unfortunately for what is otherwise an engaging critical reflection on the cultural implications of the use of nonstandard orthographies in literature, Minnick's belief in the theory that "comparison of the literary speech data with the data of real speakers provides a basis for evaluation of the literary data," a position that is meant to move her work beyond the problems revealed by Arac in Fishkin, opens her work up to the kinds of criticism that sociolinguist Edgar Schneider levies in a review of her work. Authenticity, Schneider argues, has not provided an adequate mediating logic between Minnick's data and her literary criticism:

> A few figures listed in a table; some words of comparison on just one or very few of the features, usually done away with by some lip service being paid to one or the other similar observation in some dialect-geographical or other study; and then on to discussions of literary criticism, for which most of the space is spent. (380)

Literary critics who want to move beyond the impressionistic work done by Carby and Gates and the superficial linguistic models adopted by Fishkin by producing more systematic approaches to literary dialect will, I argue, always be vulnerable to criticisms like Schneider's as long as we ask linguistics to prove something—authenticity—that it cannot prove.

Part of the reason that this aspect of Minnick's work cannot succeed has to do with the problems that linguists themselves admit concerning textual transcription of speech. Sociolinguist Guy Bailey *et al.*, in an article entitled "Some Effects of Transcribers Data on Dialectology," concludes that linguistic transcriptions of speech run into a series of methodological roadblocks in trying to produce objective data:

> Transcribers can (and frequently do) have a significant impact on the linguistic data they produce, often in subtle, difficult-to-detect ways. Transcriber effects can result from at least three different things: 1) conceptual differences regarding the phonetic status of particular sounds…and how they should be transcribed, (2) normative differences regarding the phonetic values of particular symbols, and (3) changing scribal practices as transcribers discover the importance of phonetic details that they have previously overlooked. (17)

Mary Bucholtz has taken this point even further by suggesting that these flaws must be understood as political in nature:

> All transcripts take sides, enabling certain interpretations, advancing particular interests, favoring specific speakers, and so on. The choices made in transcription link the transcript to the context in which it is intended to be read. Embedded in the details of transcription are indications of purpose, audience, and the position of the transcriber toward the text. Transcripts thus testify to the circumstances of their creation and intended use. As long as we seek a transcription practice that is independent of its own history rather than looking closely at how transcripts operate politically, we will perpetuate the erroneous belief that an objective transcription is possible. (1440)

While at first it may seem destabilizing for literary critics to realize that there is no there there for linguists either, it is recognition of this fact that might truly allow criticism that

is grounded in linguistics and literature. Indeed, it is not just literary critics who indulge the temptation to imagine a "real" speech against which we can test literary dialect writing. In a recent volume of *American Speech*, linguist Rudolph Troike published an essay (ominously) entitled, "Assessing the Authenticity of Joel Chandler Harris's Use of Gullah" in which he reconstructs a feature list for "real" Gullah from linguistic transcriptions and the work of dialect authors Charles Colcock Jones and Ambrose Gonzales against which he attempts to test the Gullah representations in Harris's "Daddy Jack" stories. Much of Troike's argument that late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Gullah can be adequately reconstructed as a touchstone for Harris's authenticity is built on comments such as the following: "Since both Jones and Gonzales were at least near-native speakers of Gullah, their work will be taken as being as close as one can expect to come in this period to authentic representations of a probably mesolectal register of the language" (289). The string of qualifiers ("at least," "near," "as close as one can expect," and "probably") and the spurious belief in a correlation between native speaking and accuracy of transcription reveal just how pervasive the problems of authenticity can be even for linguists. Indeed, Sumner Ives's essay (1950a) on the authenticity of Joel Chandler Harris's representations of African American English which Troike uses to justify both the central goals and the methods he uses to assess Harris's Gullah,[9] argues that a native-speaking author is actually, at times, at a disadvantage in representing the phonetics of a vernacular because many features which would strike the ear of a non-native speaker as marked are unmarked for the native speaking author. In the case of Schneider's critique of Minnick, we saw a sociolinguist finding fault with the methods of

[9] I take up Ives's central role in the development of linguistic approached to literary dialects in the literature found in Chapter 1.

a literary scholar. Yet, literary scholar Jonathan Arac's criticism of Fishkin could also apply to the work done here by the linguist Troike:

> My largest problem is that Fishkin's procedure involves almost exclusively the matching of items. There are no hypotheses to be tested; there are no modes of disconfirmation proposed; there is no definition of what overall context is relevant for assessing the issue she was concerned to resolve. (187)

Troike's 2010 essay illustrates three important truths. First, linguists can be as susceptible as literary critics are to the critical contortions that authenticity requires from its scholars. Second, the urge to assess linguistic authenticity is still very much a pressing critical problem for those interested in exploring what literary dialects *are* and what they *do*. Third, linguists and literary critics alike have yet to discover ways to free descriptive, intertextual readings of dialect texts from the methodological and theoretical impasses that the logic of authenticity creates.

As Bailey *et al.* and Bucholtz point out, and as Troike seems to ignore, linguists and literary critics both deal with unstable texts and when either imagine some "real," stable composite of linguistic data on a particular language variety, they are forgetting what forty years of (often linguistically driven) literary theory has taught us about being very careful when we imagine that some things exist outside the text. If, as Bailey, Tillery, and Andres and Bucholtz suggest, the texts which we use to construct idealizations of "real" speech are themselves unstable, what kinds of data can we produce from dialect texts and what can we do with such data? It is this question, not one that involves the red herring of authenticity, that makes Minnick's work a central influence on my own study. Minnick describes the methods behind her book Dialect and Dichotomy this way:

> Because computational methods make it possible to analyze large amounts of speech data in a corpus, and because analyzing all the available speech data can provide more accurate results than can anecdotal reports or analyses of smaller

> samples of the data, there is no reason not to apply the more rigorous standard of comprehensive analysis. (42)

In advocating a "descriptive" approach to literary dialects, I suggest that there is no reason not to complement strong qualitative work done by cultural critics such as Gavin Jones in *Strange Talk* and Michael North in *The Dialect of Modernism* on what linguist Richard Bailey calls "ideological specimens" in both literary and nonliterary sources with strong quantitative work that helps us to show how literary dialects behave on the page (125). We can, using the tools and methods developed in recent work by digital humanists and modeled on descriptive approaches to language variation in linguistics, produce data describing how an author's techniques for producing nonstandard orthography are distributed within texts. These distributions, I demonstrate in my closing chapter, produce data that can be used to perform quantitative comparisons intertextually. It is imperative, however, that we eschew the temptation to guide such data mining by efforts to recreate some kind of spoken linguistic reality in a written text and compare it to some spoken linguistic reality outside the text. By assuming that authenticity is a textual property that linguistics can help us reveal, we have already inserted our assumptions about what literary dialects *do* into our efforts to describe what they *are*. Linguists have long acknowledged the importance of describing what the features of particular language varieties *are* without judging their quality. I suggest that looking for authenticity in dialect representations has already inscribed a set of value judgments—is an author's dialect authentic and therefore politically "good," or is it inauthentic and therefore politically retrograde?—that has, thus far, precluded useful "descriptive" data. We must ask, then, what data can help us describe the patterns and distributions of an author's dialect "techniques" without imposing *a priori* judgment on their relationship to some unrecoverable "real" speech.

The literary theorist Michael Bérubé offers an insight into the necessity for separating interpretative levels that bolsters my call for a post-authenticity, descriptive approach to literary dialect writing:

> All forms of reading are interpretive but…some involve the kind of low-level, relatively uncontestable cognitive acts we engage in whenever we interpret the letter 'e' as the letter 'e' and…some involve the kind of high-level, exceptionally specific and complex textual manipulations, transformations and reconfigurations involved whenever someone publishes something like S/Z – or Surprised by Sin. (104)

Attempting to adjudicate questions of authenticity and stereotype in literary dialect texts would indeed require a high-level, exceptionally specific and ultimately futile textual manipulation, the likes of which Gates, Carby, and Fishkin do not seem interested in making and Minnick makes under the auspices of a tautology that undermines her conclusions. What makes literary dialects so interesting, however, and so ripe for critical inquiries that disavow questions of "authenticity," is that they foreground situations in which an orthographic "e" is no longer an "e." I argue that nonstandard orthographies in literature are already critically rich in the ways they deviate from and defamiliarize standard English orthographies, and that they need no validation from a comparison to spoken language to make them suitable for serious critical inquiry. An approach that tries to identify patterns in which "e"s in conventional orthographies and "e"s that are not "e"s because they mark certain words "nonstandard" should help us pose productive questions that we can ask of individual texts, entire genres, and social contexts that the pursuit of the red herring of authenticity has proscribed. I suggest that this process will allow us to articulate quantitative differences within and between texts insulated from the pitfalls inherent in tautological and impossible-to-prove impressions about which literary dialects are fullest, richest, or most "real."

I began this Introduction with a model reading of Cotton Mather's early-eighteenth-century use of literary dialect in order to focus a number of questions that scholars should ask of the assumptions, tools, and contexts they bring to their analyses of what literary dialects are and what they do. I close by offering a model reading of a critical statement on a passage of early-twentieth-century literary dialect to show how these questions can enrich and complement our literary histories and cultural criticism on literary dialect writing. Gavin Jones's *Strange Talk* makes a compelling case, free from efforts to weigh in on the authenticity of particular dialect texts, that the Gilded Age's obsession with literary dialects revealed a deep-seated cultural ambivalence. Late-nineteenth-century writers and readers both celebrated the great expressive potential of the vernacular dialects that came from marginalized regions, classes, and races even as they lamented the fracturing of the centralized cultural hegemony that these different voices harbingered. The success of Jones's work depends not on determining which texts succeed and which fail to represent vernacular speech in nonstandard writing; rather, Jones zooms out far enough to reflect on the cultural trends that were interwoven with the period's obsessions with dialect writing. I suggest that new methods that allow descriptive literary dialect data such as ratios of standard to nonstandard lexical items in a text can help us to zoom back in and engage the textual features that constituted those literary dialects.

Far from dismissing the work of scholars who look at larger cultural trends in literary dialect writing, I suggest that scholars interested in descriptive, intertextual approaches to dialect writing can find fertile ground for specific textual studies and literary-linguistic questions in the parenthetical comments of scholars taking wider views. For example, in his chapter on Paul Laurence Dunbar, Jones discusses a poem by

Langston Hughes that, for Jones, shows the Modernist poet pushing the boundaries of dialect representation that confined the Gilded Age poet:

> Play it, jazz band!
> You've got seven languages to speak in
> And then some,
> 'Even if you do come from Georgia,
> Can I go home wid yuh, sweetie?'
> 'Sure.'

Jones argues of this passage that "at the lower registers of American speech there resounds a black accent that Hughes represents with the deeply dialectal 'wid yuh'—a dialect reminiscent of literary depictions of Gullah, and markedly different from the black dialect that Hughes occasionally employs in his own poetry." Jones's scholarship here offers a valuable cultural insight, as he suggests that "this dialect represents the black, southern accent underpinning the American voice, and the black creativity that sustains the international language of Jazz." While this reading of Hughes's poem is not central to Jones's thesis, focusing as it does on a text outside of the Gilded Age, I cite Jones's interpretation of these lines from Hughes in order to show how scholars of textual studies, literary history, and literary-linguistics might generate new hypotheses by identifying suggestive details of work in other disciplines. In a footnote at the end of the Hughes passage, Jones comments, "Reprinted in J.W. Johnson, *Book of Negro Poetry*, 239-40. In the version of this poem published in *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, the last three lines are not given quotation marks (60)." We return here to the possibilities suggested by analyzing typographical decisions in dialect representations that I introduced with Mather; furthermore, we can blend observations on the presence or absence of direct quotations with considerations about what happens when literary dialect texts become anthologized. Can we read Johnson's design behind the decision not to reproduce these quotation marks? What further research would we need to do so? These

are questions that textual scholars interested in bibliographic variability could collaborate on with scholars skilled in manipulation of digital texts. While such data might only be of passing interest to Jones, his footnote seeds very productive questions in contiguous disciplines with different sets of goals.

In another note, attached to his reading of "wid yuh" as reminiscent of literary representations of Gullah, Jones comments, "Hughes's dialect poems included in J.W. Johnson's 1931 anthology do not spell 'wid yuh' in this way; Hughes maintains the conventional spelling of these words (237-8)." Does this textual variation combine with the lack of quotation marks identified above to point toward greater conservatism in Johnson's anthology than in Hughes's volumes? Do the other Hughes poems in Johnson's anthology provide sufficient context for this idiosyncratic spelling of "wid yuh" to stand out meaningfully? If not, where else might we look?

Jones's mention of literary representations of Gullah justifies a second look at the Troike article I criticized above for engaging in the impossible and unproductive pursuit of a verifiable authenticity in literary dialect representation. Despite the dubious goals Troike brings to his study of Harris, his emphasis on reading Harris in relation to other authors who represented Gullah speech in writing, including Charles Colcock Jones, Jr. and Ambrose Gonzalez, points toward the scholarly possibilities enabled by building digital corpora to help investigate the specific textual, intertextual, and linguistic questions occasioned by written transcriptions of spoken vernaculars; in this case, a corpus of Gullah texts would allow us to test, among other things, Gavin Jones's hunch that "wid yuh" hearkens back to other examples of literary Gullah. What might have been revealed had Troike applied a systematic method for compiling and analyzing a corpus of written examples of Gullah, including those in William Francis Allen's 1867 volume *Slave Songs of the United States*, in stories by Edgar Allan Poe, Jones, Jr., Harris, and

Gonzales, in twentieth-century treatises such as Melville Herskovits's *The Myth of the Negro Past* (1941) and Lorenzo Turner's *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (1949), among the many others that Jones identifies (101-15)? Doing so would have allowed Troike or those scholars coming after him to test a hypothesis that the techniques that signify "Gullah" on the page have remained largely stable through time and across genres. Proven true or false, this information would be useful for both literary critics and linguists alike. Literary historians could identify texts that seemed to represent Gullah idiosyncratically compared to their peers and investigate whether these textual differences illuminate differences in the racial politics of a text or an author. Or, Hughes scholars might try to recreate which dialect writers influenced the Modernist poet based on where phrases like "wid yuh" showed up in early works.[10] Linguists could mine such a corpus for data on the nonstandard orthographic techniques that persist in all written records of Gullah. Rather than contributing to yet another feature list which can only mis-represent a vernacular language, such data might enable hypotheses on which phonological features most saliently signify dialectal difference in the ears of observers of Gullah.

This corpus of written Gullah and many more like it await other dissertations; in my dreams, we would build a Borgesian library of digital dialect texts coded in such a way that we could establish a limitless number of contexts—chronologic, generic, race and/or gender of author, etc.—in which to test our hunches about what literary dialect techniques have appeared on which pages, literary and nonliterary alike. In reality, I conclude my dissertation with a set of hypotheses tested by analysis of a small digital corpus of late-nineteenth-century plantation fiction texts. I built this corpus and my

[10] One might imagine research in the Yale library's collection of Hughes papers guided by data generated from such inquiries.

methodology for mining data from it not to oppose the work of literary historians, cultural critics, and literary-linguists but to respond to the promise and need I identify here and in the coming chapters for multi-disciplinary efforts to enrich, refine, and retest the hypotheses we are already making about what literary dialect patterns on the page mean culturally, artistically, linguistically, and bibliographically.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the first part of this Introduction I provided some key examples from the scholarly tradition on literary dialects that illustrate the persistent and ultimately unresolvable critical problems presented by explicit and implicit assumptions that "authenticity" provides a mediating logic between what literary dialects *are* and what they *do*. In this section I contextualize these problems in a broader consideration of major statements on the literary-linguistic questions that literary dialects have brought into focus and on literary dialect as a phenomenon associated with late-nineteenth-century genres of local color, regionalism, and realism. I close this Introduction by presenting the trajectory of the four chapters that follow my literature review.

Major Statements on American Literary Dialect

George Krapp's *The English Language in America* (1925) is often cited as providing the first major statement about the intersection of linguistics and literary dialect in American literature. Krapp argues that the similarities in representations of "the most familiar" dialects in literature—"the New England dialect, the Pike County or Southwestern dialect of John Hay, Mark Twain, Bret Harte, and others, the Southern dialect, and the negro dialect"—suggest that there aren't any distinct dialects in America, but rather

> general colloquial or low colloquial American English, with a slight sprinkling of more characteristic words or pronunciations, some of which suggest fairly definite local associations, often in the case of words by connection with some peculiar local occupation or activity. (242-43)

While Krapp's conclusions have been roundly dismissed to the point of irrelevance in the scholarship that followed, I have included his thoughts in this literature review because they help to illuminate the work of his most prominent successor. The main reasons that Krapp's views are considered irrelevant are found in the arguments of Sumner Ives's foundational "A Theory of Literary Dialect" (1950, 1971). Ives takes issue with Krapp for two reasons. The first is that the fieldwork done under the direction of Hans Kurath for the *The Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada* "ha[s] made more clear the facts of American English and ha[s] made possible more certain generalizations about the regional and social speech variations" (148). For Ives, then, the quality of a statement about literary dialect is largely dependent on the quality of the linguistic scholarship on which it is based. This criticism of Krapp is a prescription for literary dialect criticism to follow on the heels of linguistic innovations—a prescription which itself calls for movement beyond the assumptions of Ives's theory. Ives's second major criticism of Krapp is methodological, claiming that his

> method for dealing with the representation of dialectal speech in literature was to select small samples and then to compare the occurrence in them of certain nonstandard forms. When he discovered that these forms appeared more or less consistently in his samples, he concluded that the dialect writers did little more than draw on this common 'low colloquial.' (148)

Ives's attack on Krapp here is based on his process of selecting his examples. In order for studies to be as objective as Ives would like them, a scholar cannot merely select passages that prove his point, but deal with a work's literary dialect in its entirety. Again, Ives established a trend with this critique—a trend toward more inclusive analysis of

literary dialect techniques which has reached its culmination in recent "corpus-based" studies of literary dialect.

In presenting his own theory of literary dialect, one based on determining accuracy, Ives suggests that "the two major conditioning factors [of his theory] have been the teachings of linguistic geography and the recognition of limitations in the conventional orthography" (149). Ives's theory, then, is based on how best to apply the linguistic records to the representations used by authors. Along the way, he acknowledges the inherent problems with comparing a set of observations about a group's speech patterns to an individual's often inconsistent and incomplete employment of these patterns. He also recognizes the problems inherent in producing what are phonetic and phonological events in an orthography that is removed from any direct correspondence between letter and sound. Yet, for Ives, an author's "spellings can actually be interpreted" in order to establish "a consistent phonology" which can be compared to the linguistic records of the speech community depicted (1954: 3). Ives and linguists coming after him such as Lee Pederson and, most recently, Troike have built studies on comparing the phonological evidence from a text's nonstandard English and the phonological features of a region, as recorded in the *Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada*. The problems that Ives's work has embedded in the work of those who follow his theory is that the feature lists on which linguistic atlases are built are no longer linguistically current, with sociolinguists now much more interested in frequency and variability in the linguistic features that vernacular speakers employ. This fact strengthens Arac's criticism that "matching features" from speech to literary representations of speech does not adequately incorporate lessons from linguistic research.

Essentially, Ives enumerates many of the logical and methodological snags that a scholar hoping to show authenticity cannot avoid and that make the very attempt futile

before he proceeds with efforts to prove authenticity anyway. For example, he states that an author "is an artist, not a linguist or a sociologist, and his purpose is literary rather than scientific" (1971: 147) before he approaches Harris's AAE in the kind of scientific manner that was supposed to put Krapp to shame. Included in this list of pitfalls for someone attempting to apply Ives's theory is the "compromise" that must be reached between authors and readers based on a balance between accuracy and readability. An example of this pitfall may be found in Eric Stockton's "Poe's Use of Negro Dialect in 'The Gold Bug'" (1971) in which he concludes, after extensive discussion of the linguistic features of Jupiter's speech,

> The author, however, took race and the story's locale into consideration successfully. Save for two or three humorous folk etymologies, Poe invented no linguistic features for [Jupiter]; they are all duplicable elsewhere, and the overall dialect is enjoyable" (214).

While Stockton's essay is linguistically grounded and gives the lion's share of its attention to "morphology and syntax," "consonants and vowels," and "vocabulary," Stockton's assessment seems more motivated by his own enjoyment of the character and the story than in any conclusion produced by an objective inquiry. I say this because what are "two or three humorous folk etymologies" for a reader who enjoys the story can be evidence of something quite different for a reader who doesn't, especially a reader, like Morrison, who is concerned with Poe's racist legacy.

Beyond the problems inherent in Stockton's efforts to combine an unproductive feature-list matching with his enjoyment of the story, Stockton also employs another problematic term, "eye dialect," in trying to articulate which nonstandard orthographic features are authentic and which are not. In discussing the spellings of *rap* for "wrap" and *nose* for "knows," Stockton says,

> such needless misspelling is 'eye-dialect.' It serves the unfair purpose either of implying that a pronunciation is substandard when it is actually a variety of the standard, or of claiming that an unlettered person would adopt the homonymous or otherwise incorrect spellings given him were he to write the words in question. (196)

While Stockton has assumed that "eye-dialect" spellings are unfair to the characters they are ascribed to, we should be skeptical of whether the differences between eye-dialect spellings and authentic efforts to represent a real phonology are clear cut, given the already tenuous relationship between orthography and phonology. Furthermore, the very problems that Stockton finds with Poe's eye dialect misspellings would limit the incredibly suggestive readings that Huck's use of "sivilize" presents as an instance where the unlettered person is able to critique the linguistic and cultural standards being imposed upon him by "standard" speakers. Eye dialect, then, becomes yet another rhetorical tool employed by literary dialect scholars to obscure their own situated evaluations of dialect texts behind presumably objective distinctions between "good" and "bad" orthographic techniques.[11] Even if we can distinguish between spellings meant to represent standard pronunciations in nonstandard orthography, we cannot assume that these efforts inscribe a uniform hierarchy between authors and characters. As I will show in Chapter 3, eye dialect, too, belongs to the alchemy of apologies and aspersions such as readability and characterization, that critics have mobilized to support their conclusions about who an author is and what he or she feels about the nonstandard speakers he or she has represented.

One of the fundamental questions for my study is whether a more rigorous approach to determining authenticity (like Ives's and those who follow his "theory of literary dialect") renders that critic more competent in making judgments of artistic merit. In "Literary Representation of Dialect: A Theoretical Approach to an Artistic Problem,"

[11] For a detailed reflection on "eye dialect," see Paul Bowdre's "Eye Dialect as a Literary Device."

Roger Cole points out this conundrum by asserting that "observational powers are only one aspect of the artist's (particularly the fiction writer's) abilities" (5) and therefore a study which concerns itself with authenticity is in no better position to make artistic judgments than one that does not. In the same vein as Cole's argument that dialect features, used judiciously, help an author to create characterization, Norman Page points to the fact that "fictional dialogue is conventional and non-realistic," in order to suggest that literary dialogue (of which dialect is a subcategory) allows a character to be "individualized substantially, and in some instances, almost entirely, through their speech" (16). What becomes important for both Cole and Page, then, is not the relationship between the literary and the "real" dialect but the way that the literary dialect participates in the artistic conventions of characterization. Cole's and Page's assumptions about the necessarily conventional nature of dialect writing are a welcome corrective to the Ivesian idea that correspondence between fictional and real speech may be established. Both Cole and Page approach dialect as a series of clues for the reader to understand the social position of a character in relationship to other characters rather than as types and tokens of actual linguistic features. Again, I would like to point out how much responsibility exists for the reader to pick up on these clues. Indeed, one might ask what the difference is between dialect clues pointing to "real speech" and clues pointing to other literary conventions like genre or narration.

In "Dark Dialects: Scientific and Literary Realism in Joel Chandler Harris's *Uncle Remus* Series," Michele Birnbaum not only dismisses the notion of determining authenticity as a myth, she looks to the cultural climate of Harris's time to suggest that the myth of authenticity is precisely the interpretative key to understanding the implications for Harris's representation of African American English. She argues,

> The racist consequences of representations of speech in the 1880s are enabled by the theoretical idealization of the correspondence between the utterance and its written representation, by the assumption that the scientific and the fictional are simply poles on some mimetic continuum, wherein 'scientific' transcriptions are closer to the 'real' than fictional versions. The belief that only accuracy is at stake in linguistic representation arises out of a nineteenth-century epistemology which equates truth with transparency of fact; if one can only get to raw fact there is no need to look further for the truth. (41)

For Birnbaum, issues of authenticity are not as important as the cultural fascinations (and their racist implications) with representing a marginalized group "accurately." Representations of marginalized speech communities must necessarily participate in the institutions that marginalize communities in the first place. Thus, questions of authenticity blind those seeking it from their participation in the decidedly unscientific work of setting up social hierarchies based on stereotype. Birnbaum's argument is important for this study both because it helps to outline the cultural climate from which writings like Harris's come, but it also introduces the possibility that a cultural climate can make *all* uses of literary dialect violations of the socio-political ethics valued by current critics.

Gavin Jones's *Strange Talk* shares Birnbaum's assumptions that issues of accuracy are a red herring and that understanding the cultural climate from which these representations come is the key to evaluations of dialect writing. While Birnbaum traces the essentially racist assumptions underlying ethnographic approaches to nonstandard language communities, Jones complicates this idea by finding ambivalence about language variation at the heart of the culture of the late nineteenth century. Thus, for Jones, representations of nonstandard speech are neither good nor bad; rather, they must reveal how pervasive the ambivalence about language variation was at the time. One might ask Jones, however, if Thomas Nelson Page's "negro speech" in *In Ole Virginia* is

just as ambivalent as Charles Chesnutt's is in *The Conjure Tales*.[12] Similarly, one might ask Birnbaum if Charles Chesnutt's nonstandard language in *The Conjure Tales*, coming as it does from the same cultural climate as Harris's, is also a kind of "white blackface."

These questions about comparing the work of one dialect author with another, questions that I explore throughout the chapters that follow, partake in a problem that Christian Mair points out about literary dialect criticism when he claims that "what distinguishes an artistically successful example of nonstandard language use in fiction from a poor one is nonsensical from a linguistic point of view but essential for the interpretation of the individual literary text" (113). If the same cultural climate produced both Page's and Chesnutt's dialect tales, how can we distinguish them? Does this distinction lie with the dialect representations or with what we know about the authors?

Major Statements on Literary Dialect and Realism

In *Strange Talk*, Jones asserts that "critics such as Alan Trachtenberg, Michael North, and Richard Brodhead" have investigated the "jarring political implications" of literary dialect by suggesting that

> dialect literature…was a means by which a social elite found cultural reassurance, either by creating a nostalgic elegy of pre-capitalist rural bliss [a stance which Jones attributes in a footnote to Trachtenberg], or by forging fictions of racial dominance that countered contemporary ethnic threats [attributed to North and Brodhead]." (8)

Jones uses these assertions as a background for his attempts to show how a "preoccupation with the 'realistic' rendition of nonstandard voices has obscured the wider thematic and political scope of literary dialect, its link to questions about the coherence and quality of the supposedly standard language itself" (8). The wider view of language

[12] I take up this question in Chapter 4 in which I try to articulate quantitative differences in the patterns of nonstandard orthography employed by Chesnutt, Page, and Joel Chandler Harris.

variation and culture that Jones takes is useful in getting beyond "the limits of single-author studies, of single racial perspectives (especially concerning African-American vernacular), or of strictly regional settings" (8) that he sees characterizing his scholarly predecessors. As I mention above, however, Jones's wide view makes it difficult to distinguish authors of dialect from one another because of its only passing concern with the *ways* that dialect is represented in different texts. While Brodhead in *Culture of Letters* makes generalizations about the culturally hegemonic uses that dialect writing was put to in the period that need to be complicated by scholars like Jones who argue that this trope was applied ambivalently, both critics could benefit from examining what the representations of speech on the page might tell us about the author's relationship to those uses.

Questions of the authenticity of literary dialect representations must necessarily consider work done by scholars on the larger political and social valences of literary efforts to capture realism, especially in the late nineteenth century. In *The Social Construction of American Realism*, Amy Kaplan argues that "realism simultaneously becomes an imperative and a problem in American fiction. It neither compensates for the absence of a complex social fabric nor records a naïve belief in the correspondence between language and the intractable material world; rather it explores and bridges the perceived gap between the social world and literary representation" (9). My work benefits from such an argument, particularly in Kaplan's analysis of the relationship between the foreground and the background in Howells's *The Hazard of New Fortunes*, about which she says, "critics have long treated the city in *Hazard* as the setting of the novel, evaluating it in terms of its fidelity to the historical New York City. I am suggesting that background and foreground are neither historical categories nor purely formal demarcations within the text. Navigating the course between these two realms becomes a

major strategy for settling the city and making it real" (53). This argument may be extended to dialect writing, which would seem to rival and perhaps even surpass the geography of a literary setting as the basis for investigations of accuracy. Kaplan's insistence that the apparent opposition between a text's relationship to "reality" and its "formal demarcations" (like those conventions which set up the distinctions between dialect characters and "standard" speakers) are actually just aspects of the larger problem of trying to determine to what degree a work of art reflects, questions, or even causes social distinctions. Thus, authenticity in dialect writing might be seen as a more focused version of "realism" in Kaplan's argument that "realism cannot be understood only in relation to the world it represents; it is also a debate, within the novel form, with competing modes of representation" (13). In her brief comments about the dialect character Lindau, Kaplan suggests that the representations of the character's accented speech have the potential to defamiliarize and question the capitalist concepts he discusses, but, ultimately, Howells's comic manipulation of Lindau's speech causes Kaplan to conclude that "the realistic representation of Lindau's speech turns against itself: by bracketing his language as 'other' and 'unreal,' it contains the unsettling effects of his words" (58). This is an important interpretative insight and might be useful in examining the not-unrelated bind Charles Chesnutt found himself in, realizing that dialect writing was the only way in which his work would be read, but that such representations diminished the seriousness with which his works were read. Eric Sundquist's work on Chesnutt (and to a smaller degree, Paul Laurence Dunbar) in *To Wake the Nations* also takes up the problems with using a tradition responsible for many of the linguistically enforced stereotypes in order to subvert or signify on the hollowness of those stereotypes.

Nancy Glazener picks up on the problem of how using dialect complicates the way in which the message is received, not for literary characters like Lindau, but for

authors who participated in the flood of dialect writing that overwhelmed American literary culture in the late nineteenth century. Glazener suggests that

> writers like [Mary] Murfree who had actually lived in the regions they wrote about ran the risk of being cast as mere native informants whose authorial talents only fitted them to depict their own kind…Conversely, writers who were not natives or long inhabitants of the region they wrote about risked seeming like formula writers: if not quacks, as sentimentalists were accused of being, then professional researchers rather than professional artists. (199)

Glazener accepts the notion, based on Brodhead's and Kaplan's arguments, that the "main ideological burden of regionalist writing, as it was constructed within the *Atlantic* group, and as Brodhead's and Kaplan's analyses eloquently testify, was to dramatize and elaborate the marginality of rural populations" (201), but she does so only to suggest that perhaps the regionalist form could also have the potential to set up a kind of decentralized forum for the expression of the real, modern, economic, and political problems facing rural communities—those which were treated elegiacally in "high art." That regionalism could be used to speak against those very power structures that it seemed to instantiate is again a useful consideration for this dissertation because it prompts reflection on how the specific features of dialect representations might be used to substantiate a claim that a regionalist work was indeed "writing back."

In *Language, Race, & Social Class in Howells's America*, Elsa Nettels collects many of the arguments made by scholars of realism about the cultural climate of the late-nineteenth century around her discussion of perhaps the most influential man in that climate, William Dean Howells. The primary issue that Nettels takes up in her two chapters on dialect writing is the paradoxical goal that Howells had for literature that would unite Americans by showing them their differences. Nettels shows how this paradox informs many of the effects of Howells's influence on literature in general and on dialect writing particularly. Nettels argues that "Howells upheld the principle of unity

in diversity. He could affirm this principle without inconsistency when he portrayed regional differences in the speech of educated Anglo-Saxon Americans of the same social class. But in his portrayal of speakers of nonstandard English, the contradictions implicit in his definitions of realism become apparent" (71). To a large degree, the contradictions that existed for Howells exist still for scholars of literary dialect. We still have not comfortably answered the question of what dialect does in literature—does it "liberate or limit" (Minnick xvi)? I suggest that prescribing our analysis to these two binaries precludes a range of critically productive questions about literary dialect might have done textually, linguistically, and culturally.

While many of the arguments discussed above have shown how establishing the cultural climate that surrounds a text is paramount to mounting arguments about *why* nonstandard representations of speech manifested themselves in the literature of the late 19th century and for hypothesizing about how readers received those representations, Phillip Barrish, in *American Literary Realism, Critical Theory, and Intellectual Prestige, 1880-1995* provides a useful example of how a reading can take notice of the specific manipulations of language in dialogue and narration in order to show *how* a work of literature participates in the larger cultural concerns of the time. For Barrish, the defining cultural concern for the texts he analyzes is taste, which he illustrates as an elusive, shifting set of cultural valuations placed on material objects that are necessarily mediated by constructions of language. In discussing dialect's relationship to taste, Barrish reinforces some important assumptions I make in this dissertation, particularly those related to a reader's role in claiming competence for himself as a reader of dialect, a claim which implicitly suggests the ability to tell the "real thing" and the "artificial" apart, even when that distinction has nothing to with reality. Barrish suggests that it was William Dean Howells "who first tried to establish that educated and refined literary taste could

be demonstrated through one's judgments of literary dialect" (20). For this reason, literary critics must be attuned to the ways in which our current literary-critical tastes manifest themselves in our efforts to judge literary dialects objectively.

While Barrish's comments on Howells and dialect help to position the trope within a larger social and intellectual context of taste, he also provides a specific look at how dialect features might be used in an argument that connects the micro- and macro-scales of interpretation. In a reading of the retrospective, first-person narrating voice of *The Rise of David Levinsky*, Barrish points out that Cahan often leaves off final consonants in representations of Yiddish dialects in order to complicate the verb tenses of Levinsky's statement: "'The difference between taste and vulgar ostentation was coming slowly, but surely, I hope'" (qtd. in Barrish, 84). Rather than trying to establish whether consonant cluster reduction was *actually* a feature of the kind of Yiddish-English that a character like Jake from *Yekl* might use, Barrish points to this as a pattern as a way to argue that

> the good taste Levinsky displays by not ostentatiously vaunting its arrival still does not entirely explain his insertion of 'I hope,' which is almost ungrammatical in its juxtaposition of the past imperfect with a present-tense affective state supposed to refer to it, instead of the expected 'hope*d*.' The hint of error here, especially striking in a passage where Levinsky stresses his efforts to acquire 'genteel' American ways, is reinforced by the fact that the elided final 'd' is Cahan's most frequent signifier of immigrant dialect. (84)

In many ways, this reading is an example of the kind of reading that this study advocates. It combines concerns with patterns of dialect representation with a sense of how these patterns may be made useful in consideration of issues other than "accuracy." It is also flexible enough to see that standard and nonstandard are not hard and fast barriers between representations of language. The corpus-based approach I advocate above and especially in Chapter 4 would provide readings like Barrish's with data that

would only make them stronger: a way to justify the assertion that "the elided 'd' is Cahan's most frequent signifier of immigrant dialect."

CHAPTER DESCRIPTIONS

The chapters that follow offer a series of readings of literary-historical and literary-critical moments that articulate a coherent logical trajectory. I assert in Chapter 1 that the broader literary value "authenticity" was, at least since the middle of the nineteenth century, the product of extratextual transactions between writers and readers rather than the result of any objective assessments of verisimilitude, transactions which I call "games of confidence." In my second chapter, I show that dialect representations in antebellum humor texts offered readers and writers the opportunity to conventionalize the rhetorics in which assessments of authenticity were presented in the second half of the nineteenth century. In particular, I focus on paratextual efforts by dialect writers to condition their readers' responses to the quality of their dialect representations. In my third chapter, I analyze the ways that linguistics became central to efforts to assess authenticity in the middle of the nineteenth century, yet argue that these efforts have been beset by many of the "games of confidence" that emerged in nineteenth century assessments of verisimilitude. I then problematize many of the late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century critical works that have tried to base their interpretation of literary dialects as cultural artifacts that participate in processes of racialization on an explicit or implicit belief in objective authenticity. In my fourth chapter, I explore new possibilities for linguistically driven research, free from the tautological demands of provable authenticity that point toward more productive analyses of how literary dialect techniques and literary form intersect with interpretations of the cultural and political issues that dialect writing illuminates.

In my first chapter, "Melville's Quarrel with Reality" I confront the degree to which our answers to questions of authenticity are produced outside the text in a kind of "confidence game" between authors and readers. I read key moments in Herman Melville's career as prose writer as a case study of an author who tries unsuccessfully to satisfy his readers' desire for authentic representation. I show that *The Confidence Man,* a text obsessed with what authors can and cannot make readers believe dramatizes Melville's vexing early experiences in trying to convince readers that *Typee* was a "real" account of an American sailor castaway on the Marquesan Islands. I use the metaphor of the confidence game to draw a line from Melville's work to the work of late-nineteenth-century local color writers such as Mary Murfree, who was faced with similar evaluations of authenticity based not on close scrutiny of her texts but on readers' impressions of who she was.

My second chapter, "How Humor Got Serious: James Russell Lowell and the Prefacing of Authenticity," demonstrates that the sharp generic and chronological lines critics have drawn between antebellum humor texts and local color, regional, and realist texts have largely been based on erroneous assumptions regarding which authors and texts treated the authentic representation of speech as a serious matter. By showing that humor writers and their readers had been taking questions of authentic representation seriously well before the Civil War, I advocate including marginalized humor texts into our efforts to read regionalist, local color, and realist texts intertextually. I support this argument by comparing and analyzing prefaces that authors wrote for their dialect texts. In particular, I show that James Russell Lowell's polemical "Introduction" to his 1866 *Biglow Papers* originated and has continued to shape critical assumptions that dialect writing didn't get serious until after the Civil War.

In the third chapter, "Explaining 'Explanatory': Linguistics and Cultural Criticism in *Huck Finn*'s Dialects," I provide a genealogy of critical efforts to use linguistics to arrive at more objective analyses of the authenticity of dialect representations in literature. By tracing the critical responses to Twain's "Explanatory" in which he claims to have distinguished at least seven different dialects within the novel through the twentieth and into the twentieth century, I show that critics have largely missed the productive interdisciplinary possibilities of literary-linguistic criticism by focusing too narrowly on proving Twain's preface true or not. I show that as long as a belief in a "real" speech against which a literary dialect can be evaluated persists, we cannot take advantage of linguistic and computational tools for providing literary dialect data. I also show that these tools can aid us in our efforts to bring consideration of literary dialect features into conversation with our arguments about how racialization was realized within literary texts.

My last chapter, "Literary Forensics: Fingerprinting the Literary Dialects of Three Works of Plantation Fiction," consists of a case study in what I have called a descriptive, intertextual approach to literary dialects. This case study marks digital versions of Charles Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman*, Joel Chandler Harris's *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings*, and Thomas Nelson Page's *In Ole Virginia* allowing me to produce each text's "standardization ratio" separate and apart from the intense cultural and political issues that these examples of "plantation fiction" foreground in their representations of the speech of former slaves. I do so in order to illuminate new questions about what descriptive, intertextual analyses of literary dialect texts can do for us. Since the politics of each author have been well established—Chesnutt was the son of former slaves; Harris and Page were both avowed racists—I show that we can enrich and challenge our assumptions about how politics might perform on the page.

Chapter 1: "Who Can He Be?": Melville's Quarrel With Reality

In this dissertation, I argue that much of what we want to say about literary dialects could only be supported by evidence that is, ultimately, impossible to find: direct correlations between nonstandard orthography and "nonstandard" speech. In this chapter I explore the wider critical implications of this fact by reading Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man* as a novel that explores how much we are willing to bank on something that we cannot know for sure when we see some gain in it. The passengers of the *Fidèle*, as they make their way down the Mississippi River (and therefore never stand on *terra firma)*, engage all varieties of transactions—financial and philosophical—with partners whose identities they will never be able to verify. I use *The Confidence-Man*, then, and its insights into the unprovability of (literary) identity to set up an inquiry into the role that "authenticity" played in transactions between readers and writers in literary reviews and extratextual materials in the middle of the nineteenth century. I will argue that exchanges between authors and readers about realism in literature constitute games of confidence similar to those played aboard the *Fidèle*. Neither party can be sure who the other is, yet each side is willing to invest nonetheless. This study will help to contextualize my research on the postbellum genres of local color, regionalism, and realism, which cemented authentic representation, particularly authentic dialect representation, as a primary literary virtue. In doing so, I also offer a reconsideration of Melville as a writer of literary dialect, the trope that, conventional wisdom suggests, reached its culmination the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

Leaving aside the posthumous publication of *Billy Budd*, the bookends of Herman Melville's career as a prose writer are 1846's semi-autobiographical account of the author's time as a castaway in the Marquesas Islands, *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life*

and 1857's maddeningly circular April Fool's joke of a novel, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*. While critics have reveled in drawing and redrawing the contours of Melville's literary career, these books often constitute stable poles between which these contours are drawn. The polarity is often characterized as follows:

Typee (1846)	*The Confidence-Man (1857)*
Success	Flop
Optimistic	Nihilistic
Linear	Circular
Naïve	Cynical

Table I: Conventional Critical Binaries for Melville's "Bookend" Novels.

Of course, critics have read cynicism within Melville's early naïveté and pointed out the eddying philosophical and descriptive asides in the movement of *Typee*'s plot, but the divergent chronological (and financial) details of these texts have rarely occasioned readings of these two next to each other, with critics often favoring linear models for Melville's career to circular ones. I offer in this chapter an experiment in circularity with regard to Melville's career in which the farthest point away from *Typee* in one direction around the circle is also the closest point to it in the other. The first justification I have for this reading comes from the preface to *Typee* in which Melville writes,

> There are some things related in the narrative which will be sure to appear strange, or perhaps entirely incomprehensible, to the reader; but they cannot appear more so to him than they did to the author at the time. He has stated such matters just as they occurred, and leaves every one to form his own opinion concerning them; trusting that his anxious desire to speak unvarnished truth will gain for him the *confidence* of his readers. [emphasis mine]

John Bryant calls this a "nervous preface" and argues that the edits and revisions that constituted Melville's "varnishing" of the text reveal an author who "was 'anxious' to meet his audience: anxious to have their praise, anxious for their complaint." I find, however, beyond the anxieties revealed for Bryant by the three editions of this "fluid text" a powerful echo in the term "confidence," one that demands a closer look at the relationship between Melville's early tale of the Marquesas and his late Masquerade. In particular, I draw connections between *Typee* and *The Confidence-Man* by showing that the publication and reception histories of *Typee*, which reveal a number of largely unsuccessful and occasionally absurd maneuvers on the part of Melville, his brother-agent Gansevoort, and his London publisher John Murray to gain the confidence of readers that this book was in fact the real account of a common American sailor, have surprisingly suggestive echoes in the early scenes of *The Confidence-Man*. In particular, the first two avatars of the confidence man, the deaf mute in cream colors and the crippled entertainer Black Guinea, both dramatize a scene Melville was all too familiar with: a writer/artist/performer failing to set the terms by which he "meets" his audience, and, as a result, finding himself the object of critical doubt, disregard, and even hostility. What follows then, is a call to draw new lines between Melville's early and late fiction based on the confidence game played between readers and writers when literary marketplaces demand the "unvarnished truth" in fiction.[13] I extend these considerations to Melville's relationship with the literary trope that was soon to become integrally interwoven with "realism" in fiction: literary dialect. In doing so, I offer *The Confidence-Man* as a valuable if antic theoretical text regarding the late-nineteenth-century's

[13] The resonances between Melville's personal narrative of hardship and those collected and analyzed in Ann Fabian's *The Unvarnished Truth: Personal Narratives in the Nineteenth-Century* remain to be explored.

obsessions with verifiable authenticity in fiction, and in particular with verifiable authenticity in how characters speak in fiction.[14]

The first avatar of the title character in Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* is a deaf mute that does little more than write some biblical aphorisms about charity on a chalkboard before going to sleep. The crowd that gathers around him takes no interest in what he writes, beyond finding his "aspect…to be somehow inappropriate to the time and place, and inclining that his writing was of much the same sort." In the second chapter of the novel, entitled "Many Men Have Many Minds," we learn that part of the inappropriateness that the crowd ascribes to the mute depends on their inability to account for such a "singular" character, one who is unsettlingly uninterested in accounting for where he comes from and where he's going. While scholars have often juxtaposed the mute's chalk scrawls such as "Charity thinketh no evil" to the Barber's sign "No Trust" under which the mute reposes as an indication of the moral ambiguities in the work,[15] we might also read the deaf mute as a kind of "living text" that is rejected not for its content but because it does not provide a context in which its readers may understand it. Among the hypotheses offered by the befuddled crowd about the deaf mute being a "green prophet from Utah" or an American "Casper Hauser," someone aboard the *Fidèle* asks, "Who can he be?" At first glance, this is a straightforward question of identity: "Who is he?" but as the wild range of responses to the mute suggests, without any context to aid the answer, readers are left to conclude: "He could be anybody." In this chapter, however, which explores Melville's career as a writer who could never fully account to his readers where he was coming from and where

[14] Gavin Jones provides a compelling reading in *Stange Talk* of Billy's stutter in *Billy Budd*, which suggests that Melville was deeply aware of the politics of representing speech in writing, beyond even "dialect" representations.

[15] For a classic study, see Wadlington 137-70.

he was going both literally and figuratively, I scrutinize the ways in which readers delimit the possibilities for who an author might try to make himself by deciding who they will allow him to be. The conclusion that this scrutiny allows, which will prove relevant for this chapter and those that follow, is that readers' preoccupation with the identity of an author often circumscribes the answers we can reach about texts to an artificial binary based on the authenticity of representation: Is he who he says he is?

Melville voiced his frustrations with his inability to make himself into the writer he would like to be or the writer that his readers would pay to read in his famous lament to Hawthorne while writing *Moby-Dick*: "What I feel most moved to write, that is banned, -- it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the *other* way I cannot. So the product is a final hash, and all my books are botches." I use these modulations of meaning, however, between "can" and "might" in order to revisit Melville's vexed efforts to publish his ultimately very successful first novel *Typee* as an autobiographical account to readers hungry for extravagant tales of South Seas wanderings. Though Melville and his publisher John Murray took deliberate steps to present Melville to his readers as he was—a common American sailor who had been a castaway on the Marquesas Islands—his reviewers largely did not permit him to be the novel's author as he was. By insisting that *Typee* was too well written to be a "real" account from a common American sailor, many of Melville's reviewers put him in the absurd position of the mute with onlookers ignoring his writing in favor of hypotheses about who he was, obsessing about biographical details concerning time and place, and ignoring what Melville was feeling most moved to write at this early stage of his career. Furthermore, by tracing the absurdity of Melville's efforts to rebut his inquisitors regarding the veracity of his work in the literary magazines of the day, I provide a larger meditation on the ways in which authors who sold "reality" in fictions in the nineteenth century were forced to present

their cases for authenticity in extratextual material rather than letting their texts speak for themselves.

To frame my argument another way, many critics have found *The Confidence-Man* to be a book about the absurdity of fiction, but we have not yet perhaps grasped the degree to which the novel dramatizes Melville's experiences with the absurdity of reality; in particular, with the real ways in which "authenticity" is a target constantly being moved by readers' expectations for "reality" in fiction and their obliviousness to or disregard for the efforts of the author to achieve it. In "Melville's Quarrel with Fiction," Nina Baym argues that the seriousness of *The Confidence-Man* "resides not in any attempt to reach higher truth but in its systematic exposure of the absurdity of fiction—the banality, futility, circularity, pointlessness, and artificiality of plots, characters, settings, narrations, themes, even such conventions as chapter titles" (15). I argue that Melville's run-ins with questions about the authenticity of his own character at the start of his literary career allow us to read *The Confidence-Man* as a fictionalized account of real life futility, circularity, and artificiality, particularly as represented in the exchanges between writers and readers over authenticity. Therefore, Baym's point needs some rethinking:

> Wadlington has shown the ingenious stylistic strategies by which, more through intuition than plan, Melville attracts and wins reader confidence in *Typee* (Wadlington, pp. 56, 61, 62). His argument can be extended to point out that Melville is forced to these strategies because he is deceiving his readers; in *Typee* Melville is in fact a confidence man who is passing off lively falsehoods as truth.

While it is true that Melville passes off lively truths in *Typee* to the extent that the book was successful and not entirely biographically accurate,[16] the literary reviews on *Typee*

[16] For classic studies of the biographical accuracy of *Typee*, see Forsythe, Robert S. "Herman Melville in the Marquesas", *Philological Quarterly*, 15/1 (Jan 1936), 1-15 and Anderson, Charles R. *Melville in the South Seas* (1939).

suggest that these truths were not passed off very effectively at all, that readers didn't care as much about the "truths" as about who wrote them, and that Melville was exasperated by his inability to gain the extratextual confidence of his readers. This chapter argues, then, that we have not yet exhausted the ways in which *The Confidence-Man* can be read in relationship to Melville's other works, especially the earlier, more successful work such as *Typee* and *Omoo* which Baym sets against darker flops like *The Confidence-Man* and *Pierre*.

In the first section of this chapter, "Who Might He Be?" I read the publication history of *Typee* alongside scenes from *The Confidence-Man* in which Melville dramatizes his quarrel with the processes through which reality is produced by authors and received by audiences. In particular, I focus on the absurdity of Melville's efforts to prove himself the "real" author of the text with reviews of his own work that rebutted the conclusions of his doubting Thomases. In the second section of this chapter, "As Nobody Exactly Talks," I consider the implications of Melville's quarrel with reality as it pertains to representations of dialect in literary texts in order to suggest that this "confidence game" of authentic identity is interwoven with the authenticating power of nonstandard orthographies. I explore Melville's efforts to use representations of Polynesian speech in *Typee* and *Omoo* (another semi-autobiographical South Seas adventure) alongside one of the most famous scenes (and the only "dialect" scene) in *The Confidence-Man*, in which a black cripple's identity is questioned by those on board the *Fidèle* for whom he performs. I argue that the issue of orthographic nonstandardizatisons to mark characters as "others" seems a notable absence in Baym's list of fictional conventions that Melville hollows out, particularly because scholars have often cited dialect humor such as "The Big Bear of

Arkansas" as source texts for *The Confidence-Man*.[17] In the last section of the chapter, "Who Might She Be?" I extend my practice of reading *The Confidence-Man* as a dramatization of the confidence game—one played whenever an author tries to produce or a reader tries to evaluate what Melville called "severe fidelity to real life in a work of amusement"—to the local color genre that dominated the American literary landscape after the Civil War. In particular, I examine Mary Murfree's efforts to make herself seem masculine and therefore more authentic under the penname "Charles Egbert Craddock" and her audience's debates about the veracity of her literary representations of Tennessee dialect.

Michele Birnbaum has argued that literary dialect "is engaged in a linguistic confidence game: It bills itself as real when in fact it is idealized" (43). Ultimately, I argue that exploring how authors and readers played this confidence game throughout nineteenth century discussions of literary authenticity (and in particular of linguistic authenticity) provides continuity between writers like Melville and Murfree who are rarely discussed in the same critical book, let alone in the same chapter. By breaking the generic and chronological barriers between a great writer of the American Renaissance and a marginal author of local color, I suggest that our constructions of genre and period have obscured continuities in the processes by which nineteenth authors wrestled with the demands of readers increasingly preoccupied with authorial identity as a precondition for accepting textual representations as authentic. Furthermore, I imply that the history of the nineteenth-century literary movement toward greater concern with authentic representation not only must extend back before the Civil War, but it must also extend forward to our present moment whenever we find ourselves asking of the author of a text,

[17] The Norton Critical Edition of *The Confidence-Man* includes a section of Thomas Bangs Thorpe's story in its "Backgrounds and Sources" (229).

"Who can/might s/he be?" and, as a result, find ourselves operating within artificially circumscribed binaries set up by the faulty logic of literary authenticity.

WHO MIGHT HE BE?

Melville's career as a writer began with questions—vexing for him, illuminating for us—about his authenticity as the author of *Typee*. In John Murray, Melville found a publisher who was in search of books that provided readers with the impression of authenticity. For his "Colonial and Home Library," Murray was looking for books full of "the experiences of foreigners in strange places, and Melville's manuscript certainly provided the most 'lively' account of adventures in the South Seas that had fallen into the hands of any publisher up to that time" (Howard 279). To Murray, as important to the success of the book as an authentic account of a South Sea adventure was the authenticity of the author as the adventurer. Murray wrote to Melville's brother Gansevoort, who was handling the sale of the book while in London, "that it read like the work of a 'practised [sic] writer' who may not have experienced personally the adventures he described" (279). The problem was that *Typee* "was too good—and too predominantly—a story, and [Melville] was required to add more material about the manners and customs of a strange people in order to fulfill his publisher's promise to contribute to the 'intellectual advancement' of his readers" (280).

These efforts, apparently, were not adequate, as reviewers on both sides of the Atlantic doubted that the author was who he claimed to be. In his "Historical Note" for the Northwestern-Newberry edition of *Typee*,[18] Leon Howard relates that "the reviewer for *John Bull* on March 7 [1846],… though admiring the book, would not believe it to be

[18] Which *Typee*, and indeed, which *Typee* is *Typee*, is question for much debate. For the complex textual history of the novel and the issues presented by publishing and using online editions, see Bryant, *The Fluid Text*.

the work of a common sailor. He also—on the basis of Melville's defense of Lord George Paulet in the Appendix—doubted its American authorship" (286).[19] In the case of *Typee*, the artistic value of the story got in the way of the Melville's reviewers "admiring" the book as an authentic account of the author's travels. Whether Melville had really been to the Marquesas as a common American sailor or not (and he had been), was irrelevant; whether the reader believed he had been was what really mattered.

In essence, Melville ended up playing a game of confidence with his readers over *Typee*, and his struggles to play this game well, I argue, provide us with a new insight into the *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*. While Murray prompted Melville to change his *Typee* manuscript to make himself appear to be who he really was, his reviewers forced him to address who his readers would allow him to be. Melville played this game with his reviewers to little initial success. Howard writes that

> Melville was also unhappy after the reviews in the American papers—the New York *Evangelist* for April 9, 1846, and the *Morning Courier and New-York Enquirer* for April 17—doubted his veracity. The latter review he found particularly 'obnoxious,' and he answered it with a brief note in the Albany *Argus* for April 21. More than a month later, still in a dudgeon, he requested the assistance of his friend Alexander W. Bradford in publishing his anonymous reply to 'that malicious notice' which he was convinced would 'do mischief unless answered.' (286-7)

Melville's dudgeon was, presumably, the result of his inability to speak to his interrogators—his muteness—on the topic of his (and his book's) identity. We might wonder if the mute had spoken whether the passengers on the *Fidèle* would have even heard him. While the plight of the deaf mute dramatizes the crowd's demand that a writer be understood in the context of his biography (being a green prophet from Utah would,

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[19] The British-American polarity presented in this review prefigures my argument in the next chapter on James Russell Lowell, whose literary dialects were explicitly set against those of Thomas Chandler Haliburton, a Nova Scotian who was often derided for packaging false dialects to readers across the Atlantic who couldn't know "real" American speech.

for example, make his writings scrutable to his audience), the account of the second avatar shows a performer trying to validate his performance by answering questions of his authenticity in much the same way that Melville attempted to answer his skeptical reviewers. Black Guinea is introduced "making music, such as it was, and raising a smile even from the gravest" (7). The "*diversion*" that the black cripple offers his smiling crowd allows him to engage them in a "strange sort of pitch-penny game, the cripple's mouth being at once target and purse." While Black Guinea may be a fraud as a black and as a cripple—we never find out—the gambit of throwing and catching coins is a straightforward transaction. The crowd takes pleasure in throwing, and the cripple takes money in catching. I suggest that this pitch-penny game reflects the admiration that Melville's publisher and his reviewer in *John Bull* had for the story of *Typee*. As with *Typee*, though, merely exchanging money for pleasure is not the only game between the writer and reader. Another kind of confidence game begins when Black Guinea's authenticity as a black cripple (someone who can be the catcher of coins) is called into question:

> When this game of charity was yet at its height, a limping, gimlet-eyed, sour-faced person…after sundry sorry observations of the negro, began to croak out something about his deformity being a sham, got up for financial purposes, which immediately threw a damp upon the frolic benignities of the pitch-penny players. (8)

Throwing and catching is replaced by proving. The damp thrown by the sour-faced man causes the crowd "to scrutinize the negro curiously enough" (9). The adverb here is ambiguous: It may describe the way the crowd scrutinized the negro, or, more suggestively for this paper, it may imply that it is curious that a crowd, having happily played pitch-penny, would care to scrutinize the authenticity of their counterpart in the game.

In another vexing but illuminating twist, it wasn't Melville's responses to his skeptical reviewers that finally "proved" he was indeed the author of *Typee*. As Howard recounts,

> The *Evangelist* review produced its own answer in the person of Richard Tobias Greene, a Buffalo house and sign painter, who announced through the local *Commercial Advertiser* of July 1 that he was 'the true and veritable "Toby"' who would 'be happy to testify to the entire accuracy of the work, so long as I was with Melville.' Herman saw the letter the next day and wrote him immediately…For Toby would be witness to the truth of the narrative before those 'of little faith'—especially the 'man of the Evangelist.' (287)

Again Melville's actual experiences in the publication of *Typee*, his struggles with proving his authenticity, are dramatized in the *The Confidence Man*, perhaps even down to the detail of Tobias's profession as a sign painter which may anticipate the mute's chalkboard and the barber's sign under which he sleeps. When Black Guinea cannot provide any "documentary proof, any plain paper about him, attesting that his case was not a spurious one," he is asked, "But is there not some one who can speak a good word for you?" (10). At this point, Melville's exploration of the nature of the confidence game widens from exposing the compulsion for the audience to prove authenticity to detailing the methods by which authenticity can be proved. It was a lucky chance that "Toby" surfaced to "testify to the accuracy of the work." Melville's original plan, however, as Howard relates, was to write an "anonymous" reply to his doubters, which would, in effect, involve Melville creating another persona as a testifier to his own veracity. Accordingly, Black Guinea provides a list of his fellow avatars on the ship as those who will testify on his behalf: "Oh yes, oh yes, dar is aboard here a werry nice, good ge'mman wid a weed, and a ge'mman in a gray goat and white tie, what knows all about me" (10). The list goes on, but the important point is that there is nothing to guarantee that these men (or even the "real life" Toby, for that matter) are not also frauds. The sour-faced

cripple responds to the attempt to prove Black Guinea's authenticity by the Methodist minister, who exclaims, "'I will go find one to begin with,'" by calling the attempt a "'Wild goose chase.'" Melville shows that the crowd has switched the playable game of pitch-penny (where the throwers need no confidence in who the catcher is, only that he can catch) for a game synonymous with futility—the wild goose chase of verifiable authorial identity.[20]

"AS NOBODY REALLY TALKS"

In a book dedicated to representations of African American English in American literature, Sylvia Holton has summarized Melville's career as a dialect writer as follows:

> Herman Melville is not usually thought of as a dialect writer, and—in spite of his five years at sea during which time he often closely associated with black sailors—he did not frequently introduce black characters into his work. Yet a number of blacks are to be found in Melville's novels and stories—Babu [sic], of course, in "Benito Cereno" of 1856 (who is not a North American and is therefore not a speaker of any English dialect), the protagonist of *The Confidence-Man* of 1857 (whose Black English speech may well not be a natural dialect but rather a contrivance that serves his disguise), and several of the Pequod's crew in *Moby-Dick* (1851)—Daggoo (an African, not an American black), Pip (whose speech is sailor's dialect, not Black English), and Fleece, the cook. (66-7)

We can see the confidence game at work in her qualifications concerning which characters may be taken seriously as dialect speakers based on Melville's own biography or on his characters' fictional biographies; in particular, her hedging about Black Guinea seems to valorize my reading. Who can or might, Holton asks, Black Guinea be? In an attempt to answer that question, Holton has entered a tautological loop in which it is impossible to tell the "naturalness" of a dialect because the character is in disguise. Yet, Melville might ask sardonically, isn't the idea of a "natural" dialect in a work of literature

[20] We might also consider that the denomination of the minister is surely not without meaning for Melville; I pick up the pun of a "Methodist" trying to prove the identity of Black Guinea in my third chapter with regard to efforts to use linguistic methods to try to prove the authenticity of literary dialect representations.

already a disguise? (Or even a "natural" dialect in the real world?)[21] This point becomes clearer when we examine how Eric Lott and, more recently, Michael LeBlanc, have approached the question of Black Guinea's identity. Lott argues rather oddly (and, I will show, incorrectly) that

> By the end of the scene we realize with a jolt that this is probably a blackface performance; the attentive reader recognizes another of the confidence man's disguises. This is more than the *Fidèle*'s passengers do. Hence the dramatic irony here: Melville lifts the mask for the reader only. Indeed, a "purple-faced drover," by implication a slave trader, actually hints at capturing what he takes to be a black man (thus casually linking minstrelsy with the human traffic of slavery). The accusation of fraud extends only to Black Guinea's lameness. (62)

There are a number of suggestive problems with this reading. First of all, Black Guinea is only the second avatar of the confidence man (if indeed we are even meant to read the confidence men as avatars), so, therefore, the attentive reader does not have much in the way of a pattern to help "recognize another of the confidence man's patterns." Second, the reader does not realize anything with a jolt; rather, the reader witnesses another character—equally dubious, despite the obvious reality of his missing leg—accusing Black Guinea of being a fraud. At this point in the novel, we don't know whom to trust and throughout the novel we are instructed again and again not to get too comfortable trusting anyone. Third, the passengers of the *Fidèle do* in fact respond to the cripple's accusations and begin to interrogate Black Guinea about how he may prove the authenticity of his identity. Fourth, and most importantly for my study here is the fact that the doubting Thomas *does* in fact impugn the veracity of Black Guinea's race, calling him a "white operator, betwisted and painted up for a decoy." The elisions that Lott makes

[21] Natalie Schilling presented an as yet unpublished paper at the Linguistic Society of America 2009 Summer Institute entitled, "Linguistic artistry, artifice, and authenticity: The 'naturalness' of 'unnatural' speech" in which she suggests that instances where speakers try to conceal their "natural speech" should be of great interest to sociolinguists, who, she suggests, have perhaps given too much privilege to subject interview methods that target "natural speech" as the best form of linguistic data.

further his argument that "For all its fakery, the passage just quoted is mightily effective. We have no way of knowing that Black Guinea's 'secret emotions' are probably those of a white man pretending to be black, and so we are shocked, drawn in." Yet, Lott's argument, it appears, is just one among many interpretations of Melville's three-card Monty. The point is that we have no way of knowing anything in this book; it is a book in large part about how readers behave when they have no way of knowing or finding out the answers to questions they want to ask of the books they read. This game seems to perpetuate itself when Michael LeBlanc quotes from Lott in support of his argument about racial con games:

> The second incarnation of Melville's confidence man is "a grotesque negro cripple," a beggar called Black Guinea. A passenger with a wooden leg accuses Black Guinea of being in blackface—"He's some white operator, betwisted and painted up for a decoy" (15)—but most of the other passengers trust that their eyes do not deceive them, and that the black man before them is authentic. The color of the skin's surface serves as a visual index for the inner core of "blackness." Eric Lott puts it well: "Blackface here is one more con game" (62). (14)

Does Lott's misleading assertion that in this scene the text subtly but clearly conveys to the reader that Black Guinea is wearing blackface function as expert testimony in support of LeBlanc's interpretation? Again, the novel seems to reinscribe Melville's quarrel with reality. The point here, above all, is that nobody mentions Black Guinea's speech as an identifying characteristic. It is clear that Lott is wrong that only his lameness is called into question and that LeBlanc is wrong that the passengers believe Black Guinea. Given that Black Guinea is the only dialect character in the story and that all the passengers and most of the critics who read his chapters ignore the orthographic decision to deviate from standard English in order to "paint" his character, we might take a look at how Melville's readers responded to Melville's efforts to record language variation in his early writings

as part of his efforts to promote greater fidelity to reality. Could it be that we need to add "dialect" to Baym's list of things that Melville illustrates the futility of in fiction? If so, what effects does thinking of literary dialect as a confidence game have on our own readings of the dialect texts from the second half of the nineteenth century, a period we are told was "crazy about dialect literature" (Jones 1)?

Beyond the purview of Holton's interests, we see that Melville's attempts to represent the language of the natives he encountered in the Marquesas Islands and on Fiji in *Typee* and *Omoo*, respectively, shed new light on how we should view the confidence game of literary authenticity as Melville lived it with *Typee* and then theorized it in *The Confidence-Man*. Melville's attempts at written representation of dialect first appear in his use and comments on the language of the islanders he encountered. In Chapter 30 of *Typee*, which contains a great deal of the "manners and customs of a strange people"—the type of material that Murray had encouraged Melville to include more of in the book—Melville provides the subtitle, "A few thoughts on the Typee Dialect." Melville observes in this section that "the Typee language is one very difficult to be acquired; it bears a close resemblance to the other Polynesian dialects, all of which show a common origin. The duplication of words, as 'lummee lummee,' 'poee poee,' 'muee muee,' is one of their peculiar features" (224). Not only do these observations justify reading Melville alongside local color and regionalist authors from the late nineteenth century who thought of themselves as ethnographers and artists, they also invite an essential set of methodological and theoretical questions I will explore more thoroughly in the chapters that follow: Namely, what does linguistics have to do with literary dialects?

In two articles on the use of Maritime Polynesian Pidgin and Pidgin English in *Typee* and *Omoo*, Emanuel Drechsel, a linguist at the University of Hawaii-Manoa, undertakes an analysis of how "true" Melville's observations on language were. The

results reveal two very different Melvilles for Drechsel. In "Sociolinguistic-Ethnohistorical Observations on Maritime Polynesian Pidgin in Herman Melville's Two Major Semi-Autobiographical Novels of the Pacific," the linguist determines that, in *Typee* particularly, Melville's representations of the Maritime Polynesian Pidgin "are reconstitutable by comparative evidence from Polynesian source languages, and deserve recognition for their accuracy on grounds of their uniformity with independent data as well as their overall internal structural consistency" (231). Drechsel provides a list of nine different linguistic attestations that match with independent evidence on Maritime Polynesian Pidgin, one of which, "wide use of reduplications to indicate mass or plurality, repetition or continuation, or intensity," accords with Melville's own observation on the language recorded above. In contrast to the viability that Drechsel finds for Melville's ethno-linguistic observations and his representations of Polynesian Pidgin, Drechsel's analysis of Melville's Pidgin English in *Omoo* presents a much different conclusion:

> The author's attestations of [Pidgin English]…prove suspect as accurate documentation of how Pacific Islanders communicated with newcomers at the time. Sociolinguistic and political conditions of Tahiti and the Marquesas in the 1840s would not warrant a second, European-based medium, and specifically English, when Europeans were only about to establish themselves in the islands and when, at the time, the principal colonial power was France. (50)

While I have argued forcefully against efforts to evaluate the quality and authenticity of literary dialect representations in literature, Drechsel's triangulation of historical and socio-political conditions raise a number of productive questions about the contexts that scholars of nineteenth century American dialect writing might create for their readings of nonstandard speech. Drechsel concludes his essay on Melville's Pidgin English with a lesson that might be productively analogized to efforts to analyze literary dialects closer to home: "Ultimately, the Pidign English in *Typee* and *Omoo* serves as a telling example

to caution us about projecting modern or recent sociolinguistic conditions back onto periods of early colonial exploration, when different sociolinguistic circumstances applied" (61). Not being a scholar of source texts for nineteenth-century Maritime Pidgins, which rely heavily on contact accounts from Western sailors, I cannot weigh in with confidence on the degree to which my quarrels with proving authenticity apply to Drechsel's work.[22] However, in his close analysis of these Pidgin languages, Drechsel articulates a substantive textual difference between *Typee* and *Omoo* that resonates with my research concerns:

> Pidgin English is the primary interlingual medium of Pacific Islanders in the follow-up novel [to *Typee*] *Omoo*, in which Maritime Polynesian Pidgin almost disappears as the interlingual medium of Pacific Islanders—apparently for no obvious linguistic or sociohistorical reasons. (49-50)

Drechsel accounts for this shift he perceives from attestable representations of a sociolinguistically, temporally, and spatially viable Polynesian Pidgin to an unfounded Pidgin English in Melville's Pacific novels in a way that echoes Birnbaum's confidence game: "Melville's "Pidgin English" apparently served literary purposes, which—along with questions about the transliteration of native speech and the related issue of Anglophone-Anglophile hypercorrections—render his attestations for it as suspect" (10). With what we know about Melville's attempts to appease Murray's designs for his works, according to perceptions of readers' demands, Drechsel's hypothesis that this textual shift was the result of literary goals seems reasonable. As I suggest in my Introduction, literary representations of speech seem to demand a kind of interdisciplinarity; scholars who take a close look at the representational techniques on the page can articulate intertextual

[22] I might challenge Drechsel the same way that I challenge Troike in my introduction. That is, rather than assuming that some source texts give us the "real" against which Melville can be compared, we should be looking to build corpora, including Melville's transcriptions within which anomalous orthographic features might stand out as such.

differences that can enrich or challenge the assumptions of those interested in wider views.

The possibility that Melville's attempts to represent Polynesian Pidgin authentically may have fallen on deaf ears of readers who desired a more readable Pidgin English, good enough to mark the Island characters as sufficiently "other," finds its fictional counterpart again in the situation of Black Guinea. While Black Guinea's skin color and lameness are indeed part of his masquerade if he is a fraud, what about his speech? Black Guinea is the only character in the book who speaks in dialect and he is the first avatar of the confidence man to speak in the novel, yet his dialect is not remarked upon at all by his audience; even his inquisitor does not suggest that he is putting on his speech. This fact again suggests that Melville has dramatized the maddening features of the confidence game he played with *Typee*, but it also provides a perspective on the shifting expectations that readers have for dialect and, by extension, authenticity in works of fiction. If ignoring dialect while pursuing other means of verifying authenticity is one response to dialect writing, then proving the accuracy of that dialect is another, but *The Confidence-Man* suggests that these are both moves in the wrong game. Melville compares those who "exact this severe fidelity to real life" unfavorably to those who "sit down to a work of amusement tolerantly as they sit at play, and with much the same expectations and feelings" (158). They are the readers who take as a prerequisite for the "play" (and the pun is not unimportant) that "the people in fiction, like the people in a play, must dress as nobody exactly dresses, talk as nobody exactly talks, act as nobody exactly acts. It is with fiction as with religion: it should present another world, and yet one to which we feel the tie" (158). While Melville suggests that "talking" is a key component of characterization, how Black Guinea talks is left off the table by those looking for proof of his authenticity.

WHO MIGHT SHE BE?

As many scholars of the nineteenth century have pointed out, how a character talks became an obsession with authors and readers after the Civil War. In order to show how this obsession intersects with the confidence game Melville dramatized, I turn to the case of Mary Murfree, the local color writer from Tennessee, who wrote under the penname Charles Egbert Craddock. As with Melville, Murfree's career as a writer was inseparable from the question, "Who can s/he be?" Emily Satterwhite writes in "Reading Craddock, Reading Murfree: Local Color, Authenticity, and Geographies of Reception" that

> most readers had known Murfree as Charles Egbert Craddock, the pseudonym under which she had published her stories in the Atlantic Monthly and then, with Aldrich's support, in the popular collection *In the Tennessee Mountains* (1884). 'No one,' remarked the anonymous writer for the Herald, 'can have suspected that the master of a style so strikingly masculine as that in these mountain tales was not a man.'

The presumption of identity based on the content of a literary work recalls Melville's experiences with *Typee*, but it is important to note that it is not the events and characters represented in the work that suggested that Craddock was not a woman, but the style, which was written in a highly nonstandard orthography meant to suggest the dialect of the mountain folk. The representation of dialect for Murfree was inextricably tied to the identity of the author, the perception of which was manipulated extratextually by her choice of a penname.

The contemporary responses to Murfree's work (which is, within her genre and her time period, synonymous with her dialect writing) reveal an interesting sample of evidence to suggest that Melville's two categories of readers—those who "play" the confidence game and those for whom verifiable confidence is the goal of the game—help us to articulate the ways the literary dialects catalyze divisions among readers. In order to

show that many men had many minds about Mary Murfree's dialect, I present contemporary critical responses to Murfree in the same manner that Melville presents the responses to the mute in the second chapter of *The Confidence-Man* (though I number mine for easier reference):

1. "Mr. Craddock writes a fine terse, narrative style, entirely 'the right word in the right place,' united to a knowledge of the dialect as complete as possible."
2. "The writer [of the review], having resided for many in sight of the Cumberlands upon one side and the Smokies on the other, has become to some extent familiar with the customs and language of the mountain people. He has not been able to resist the charm of this brilliant author, but has always positively denied the accuracy of her dialect."
3. "Although I am burdened with no personal grievance, I have long felt that I should like, quite regardless of the possible consequences to my personal safety, to disagree fiercely with those reviewers who find fault with the dialect of Miss Murfree's admirable stories. For a half-score years it was my fortune to hear this dialect spoken, and I believe that I am competent to testify to the wonderful accuracy of that author's reproduction. I have never been able to detect in this lady's art anything that is not in perfect accord with the most scrupulous fidelity to nature."
4. "We are disposed to believe the critics who say Miss Murfree's dialect is not absolutely correct; we are disposed to go farther, and question whether the high souls she places among her stolid mountaineers do really exist there, or whether the commonplace types with whom she surrounds them are not in fact all there

are. At all events, whether from life or from her own imagination, she has made a beautiful story, highly poetic in its character, and entirely unique."[23]

I have suggested that there are really two confidence games that the question "who can he be?" dictates. The game that Melville disdains, the one in which the readers exact severe fidelity to real life and erroneously engage in a wild goose chase of authentic identity that equates biography with authentic representation shows itself here in the first three reviews. By suggesting that Craddock (Murfree) has knowledge of the dialect as complete as possible, the first reviewer (1) enters a closed loop with the author, in which dialect authors who have complete knowledge are recognized by readers of the same sort. The second reviewer (2) plays the role of the sour-faced cripple, the man with the wooden leg who knows more about being crippled than Black Guinea. His appeal to his own authenticity as a "knower" of the dialect in question again assumes that literary dialect is a record of knowledge, and therefore the authenticity of the writer must be scrutinized. The third reviewer (3) uses the same strategy to attest to Murfree's accuracy; the opposite conclusions of the two reviewers based on the same criteria recalls both the intervention made by "Toby" and the futile pursuit of the other confidence men to speak on Black Guinea's behalf. It is in the fourth review (4) in which Melville's preferred reader weighs in. While acknowledging that the dialect may not be perfect, this reviewer rates the artistic value of the work based on the pleasure he derives from it. In Murfree's writing he sees "novelty" and "nature, too; but nature unfettered, exhilarated, in effect

[23] These examples were "mined" from the essential American Periodical Series database. I discuss in the next chapter the complications inherent in using such a wide-ranging tool for such specific uses. Liz Lorang and Brian Pytlik Zillig have offered a useful reflection on the need for methodological consistency and transparency in the use of digital databases. I provide a more systematic discussion of my methods in the next chapter, but for now, these reviews point toward many more rich studies to be done in which we might, for example, categorize reviews that discussed "Craddock" and dialect, those that discussed "Murfree" and dialect, and those that brought to the fore the "split personality" of the author of these Tennessee mountain texts.

transformed" (*C-M* 158). For this reader, it would indeed be curious to scrutinize the authenticity of Murfree's dialect representations, when, as so many modern critics have pointed out before proceeding to scrutinizing a literary dialect's authenticity, authors are artists, not scientists.

CONCLUSION

Murfree's pen name and its effects on her readers draws another interesting parallel to Herman Melville and the wild goose chase for verifiable authorial identity, given that a reviewer from *Blackwoods Magazine* doubted the authenticity of Melville's real name: "He writes like one…who has read books….Herman Melville sounds to us vastly like the harmonious and carefully selected appellation of an imaginary hero of romance." I argue that the pervasiveness and continuity of the contortions performed by authors and readers of nineteenth-century literary texts in order to prove or disprove authenticity demand that we revisit how authenticity and identity were woven into extratextual conversations on literary representations and in particular on literary representations of nonstandard speech. Much as the study of race in the nineteenth century has recently moved beyond questions of identity and its attendant politics to examinations of how racial divisions were constructed at the time, I will argue in the following chapters that scholars of literary dialect must move beyond questions of who authors were to questions of who they made themselves and who they were made out to be by their readers. In the next chapter, I take up the case of James Russell Lowell, who has become the critical signifier for a shift toward greater concern with authenticity of representations of speech in literature after the Civil War. In doing so, I point out that Lowell's representations of Yankee speech were not in any textually verifiable way "authentic," but rather that he was the first truly adept player of this extratextual

confidence game. By playing on his identity as a native New Englander—one for whom Yankee speech was a "mother tongue"—*and* as a famed Harvard professor of languages, he was able to win a game that Melville seemed doomed to lose and lose. Unlike Melville, who was forced to turn to others and toward an anonymous avatar of himself as an "expert" witness to his own veracity, Lowell masterfully merged these roles of guileless author and all-knowing critic in his "Introduction" to his 1866 edition of the *Biglow Papers*. I will show that, in doing so, Lowell framed the logic and vocabulary subsequently employed by authors and reviewers (like those on Murfree quoted above) in nineteenth-century discourse on textual authenticity and authorial identity. More suggestively, I argue that this new critical history of dialect literature in the nineteenth century forces modern critics to scrutinize the contortions we have performed when we make authenticity and identity central features of our criticism and to re-imagine approaches to dialect texts that allow more open and productive games to be played with literary dialect texts and the situated moments of their publication and reception.

Chapter 2: How Humor Got Serious: James Russell Lowell and the Prefacing of Dialect Authenticity

> *But now, says I, Mr. printer, if I've got to make this ere preface that you tell about, what must I put into it? O, says he, you must tell 'em something about the book; how you come to make it, and what's in it, and what it's good for, and the like of that.*

The above epigraph comes from Major Jack Downing's "Preface" to Seba Smith's *Life and Writings of Major Jack Downing*..., published in 1833. This volume was a collection of letters published between 1830 and 1833 in Smith's own *Portland Courier* (and reprinted and often counterfeited in newspapers throughout the country to great success) between the fictional Major, who rises through the political ranks in Jacksonian America to become a trusted confidant and cabinet member of the first "common man" president, Andrew Jackson, and his relatives back home in Downingville, Maine. Walter Blair and others have pointed to the collection of Downing letters as a major early work of American humor, which was, generally speaking, a genre in which fictional vernacular characters applied a naïve common sense to the political doings of the antebellum period.[24] It is understandable, then, that Jack's answer to the question "what it's good for" is centered squarely on the implications of what was for Smith a rather disturbing trend of political ascendancy based on cronyism and loyalty to Jackson rather than on qualifications and merits. Jack writes, "And in the last place, as to what it is good for, it

[24] In his "Introduction" to *Mirth of Nation*, Blair writes "humor with an emphatic native quality, which amusingly displayed localized characters and characteristics as well as various American social and political foibles, and which realized at least some of the possibilities of a typical technique, became widely popular during the years between 1825 and 1833. During this period, both the East and the West were represented by humor of more than sectional appeal." He goes on to justify his chosen date for the beginning of American dialect humor, 1830, with explicit reference to Smith's Major Jack Downing: "The year 1830, among the various ones which might be chosen as a starting point, merits special attention because during that year both Down East humor [Yankee] and frontier humor were well represented, in American almanacs and newspapers then (and thereafter) hospitable to native comedy, and because that year marked the birth date of Jack Downing, the leader of a century-long parade of similar popular comic native figures." (38-9)

will tell folks more about politics, and how to get offices, than ever they knew before in all their lives." For modern critics, though, the question of what a work like *Life and Writings* is good for has had much more to do with how the Yankee dialect employed by Smith and others like Thomas Chandler Haliburton in his Sam Slick tales set in motion the major literary trend of the 19th century, which was a "drift toward realism" (Blair xi) that culminated in the American literary triumphs of the late 19th century by authors like Mark Twain and Stephen Crane. Richard Bridgman sums up this trend in his venerable *The Colloquial Style in America*:

> The fundamental question for all those working with the vernacular was how to eliminate the taint of vulgarity and of humor that normally accompanied popular speech. Taking a long view of the nineteenth century for a moment, one can trace the vernacular's increasing acceptance in the familiar descriptive terms "prose humor," "local color," and "realism." They signal the progressive flooding of the literary world with a common speech that for more and more readers is accepted as a literary norm. What was enjoyed with condescending amusement before the Civil War was encouraged after the war for its vivacious authenticity. (9)

Bridgman's long view suggests that early works of dialect humor paved the way for greater concern with the representational capabilities of fiction. Once literary dialect, however vulgar it may have seemed in the early stages, became a common trope in American literature, it was a natural progression for authors to take advantage of its ability to represent authentic American voices, and, in turn, vulgarity became authenticity. When "authenticity" became the central standard for what a book was good for, the story goes, literary dialect naturally matured into a pillar of American literary style. We might sum up Bridgman's argument by putting the key terms used by scholars subscribing to this theory of artistic development as follows:

Genre:	Humor	→	Local Color	→	Realism
Chronology:	Antebellum	→	1866-1885	→	1880-1900
Dialect Function:	Jokes	→	Accuracy	→	Authenticity
Literary Goals:	Satirical	→	Anthropological	→	Artistic

Table II: Conventional Critical Categories for American Dialect Writing

Bridgman's survey of the 19th century is based on the idea that "those working with vernacular" (the authors) improved the accuracy of their dialect representations and that those reading literary dialects became better at recognizing accuracy in literary dialects as the century moved along. The increase in seriousness of literary dialects throughout the nineteenth century and the attendant development of more serious literary genres that used dialect depended,[25] then, on a mutually reinforcing change in the intentions of the dialect authors and the expectations of dialect readers. Under this model, it is natural for Smith, ventriloquizing through the Major, to leave off mention of the Yankee dialect he uses in the 1833 "Preface" because representations of nonstandard speech, and, in particular, authenticity of those representations hadn't yet become what a dialect book could be good for. It is even more understandable, given the rather disjointed composition of the *Life and Writings* (the letters were rushed out in a volume for the most part to head off counterfeiters and plagiarizers from cashing in first), that the Major should answer the question "What's in it" with a rather off-handed example of Yankee reticence: "as to what is in the book, I guess folks will find out fast enough, without my telling them." Essentially, *Life and Writings*, by its own account and by Bridgman's, is

[25] I borrow the term "increase in seriousness" from a chapter entitled "The Cosmopolitan Increases in Seriousness" in Melville's *The Confidence Man*, a title which fits Lowell and his pivotal place in conventional histories of dialect writing rather nicely.

not a serious book, despite the very serious political concerns that prompted Smith to compose the letters in the first place.

Major Jack's fictional preface, which exemplifies a nonserious "transmitting regime" in the words of Gerard Genette's *Paratexts* seems to support Sylvia Holton's idea that "serious concern with authenticity in the representation of dialect literature would not occur until after the Civil War, really not until the more insistently realistic 'local color' fiction movement began in the 1880s" (65). Yet the preface's self-awareness and its considerations about what readers will take away from it raises some interesting questions about the roles that paratextual material played in the changes in dialect writing that Bridgman describes throughout the nineteenth century, changes that hinge on a reformation of what dialect texts could be good for. This point becomes especially clear when we consider that James Russell Lowell, the Yankee humorist and Harvard professor, has become the major figure for scholars looking to articulate those changes and that the Lowell text that receives the most attention is his "Introduction" to his 1866 edition of the *Biglow Papers*. In his seminal work *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Writing in the Gilded Age*, Gavin Jones argues that the *Biglow Papers, Second Series* (1866) "marked the new seriousness with which American dialects were beginning to be treated after Civil War," and that Lowell's long "Introduction" to this volume of abolitionist dialect poetry "threw the weight of academic scholarship behind the idea that a genuine vernacular was being recorded" (43).[26] I argue that conventional literary histories often ask us to take a telescopic view of antebellum dialect texts, seeing the playfulness exemplified in Major Jack's preface next to the seriousness exemplified in Lowell's, and to assume nothing interesting happened in between. I ask, however, in what

[26] Indeed, the academic weight of the document is noted by Baugh and Cable in their classic *History of the English Language*: "Lowell filled more than fifty pages with closely packed but eminently readable parallels to American expressions, drawn from his wide reading of the older literature of England."

literary and cultural environment did academic weight make itself relevant to texts traditionally known for their vulgarity? That is, what earlier traditions of articulating what a dialect text was good for was Lowell responding to in an academic manner?

The point I would like to make here is one that Michael Elliott and others have made in support of different critical goals, that "academic weight" does not exist in a vacuum: "The methodology of professional, distanced observation enacted a position of objectivity as a means of establishing discursive authority" (xvi). While Elliott traces the effects of a presumably scientifically sanctioned discursive authority behind the cultural lines that were drawn in the "Age of Realism," I propose revisiting how Lowell asserted "discursive authority" over nineteenth century ideas of what dialect texts could be good for and who was qualified to write them and read them authentically. Put another way, we have explored what Lowell signifies at the start of a literary-cultural trend toward more professional authorship and more ethnographic fiction. What has not been explored, however, is what Lowell signifies at the end of the cultural and political processes that attended antebellum dialect texts. A more granular analysis of the ways that writers and readers communicated the seriousness of dialect writing to each other between 1833 and 1866 allows us to show what antebellum rhetorical conventions were appropriated by Gilded Age authors who claimed the authority to write dialects and, therefore, "difference" authentically. I argue that in the absence of any way of proving linguistic authenticity for nineteenth century dialect texts that would support the logic of our current literary histories, we must seek out new methods for considering how nineteenth century writers and readers drew lines between dialect texts, authors, genres, and periods and to ask of our current critical moment whether we are perpetuating these practices when we claim to be describing them.

In order to show the necessity for writing the history of the extratextual rhetorics of authenticity and authority circulated by dialect writers and readers, I deconstruct a commonly cited example of how literary divisions between dialect texts have been articulated in modern criticism. In an effort to support his chronology of development and seriousness throughout the nineteenth century, Bridgman argues the following:

> A Yankee peddler of 1831 illustrates such early crudeness. 'Try a leetle on't mister…or maybe you'd like a box of yer own—some call it a new sort o' tooth-paste with some more varter in't than nineteen sea-hosses.' It is doubtful that 'leetle,' 'varter,' and 'hosses' belong in the same dialect. They must be regarded as generic distortions. The writer simply identifies his peddler as a Yankee, carries out some rudimentary violence upon the language, and then expects the results to be accepted as authentic…The century's gradual increase in technical expertise is reflected in James Russell Lowell's dissatisfaction a generation later with the prototypical Yankee dialect character, Sam Slick, for Lowell calls his dialect 'a complete falsification of Yankee modes of speech.' (49)

The implications of what I'm about to say are, I admit, a bit disarming for scholars who have used Bridgman as a platform on which to build their own treatments of literary dialect, but they are worth unpacking. First of all, while Bridgman doubts that the representations 'leetle,' 'varter,' and 'hosses' should be in the same "dialect" there are far too many moving parts in any process that would let us know for sure. More damningly, Bridgman has enlisted Lowell as his exemplar of technically expert dialect writing not by pointing out examples of what "real" Yankee speech show up in the *Biglow Papers*, but by quoting Lowell's "Introduction," which is itself a piece of criticism that props up the author's representations at the expense of those of his fellow Yankee humorist, Thomas Chandler Haliburton. Lowell's "Introduction" does not prove that the writers before him were technically inexpert; rather it proves that Lowell's "Introduction" was (and still is) responsible for organizing the discussions of linguistic authenticity that have

accompanied literary dialect publications since the 1830s around ideas about technical expertise.

Further evidence to be skeptical about Bridgman's use of Lowell as a disinterested commentator on Haliburton (and, for Bridgman, by extension, the entire record of antebellum dialect writing) comes from Jones's astute point that

> writers had always reacted to the unreality of one another's dialect, and such criticism often had an obvious political subtext: Lowell objected to Thomas Chandler Haliburton's ('Sam Slick's) Yankee dialect, not least because of Haliburton's antidemocratic opinions, while *The Biglow Papers* was criticized for inaccuracy by *The Spirit of the Times*, a magazine with far more conservative outlook than Lowell's. (43)

As we saw with the absurdity of Melville's efforts to find an expert witness to the veracity of his own identity in the previous chapter, Lowell is only another participant in a confidence game that Bridgman is also playing by pointing to Lowell's expertise to support his thesis. Of course evaluations of linguistic authenticity were political; how could they be otherwise? We often ignore this fact, however, when we need Lowell to leverage arguments about the nature of the sea change in dialect writing that occurred after the Civil War. As a result, the antebellum period is still largely unexplored territory for those interested in how literary boundaries between dialect texts, authors, genres, and periods intersect with the political boundaries that these texts drew and redrew throughout the nineteenth century. More pressing, perhaps, than expanding the canon of literary dialect texts deserving critical attention, is the need to reassess the degree to which our own critical efforts to describe the literary dialect phenomenon end up perpetuating the very rhetorics of authenticity and authority that were employed throughout the nineteenth century.

In the first section of this chapter, "Articulating Differences Among Dialect Texts" I offer a more quantitative approach to describing how nineteenth century

audiences distinguished between dialect writers outside of subjective questions of seriousness or authenticity. I use queries in the essential American Periodical Series to examine which Yankee dialect authors were associated with the terms "Yankee" and "dialect" and how often these authors were associated with one another. In the second section "The Old Seriousness" I provide a qualitative study of how antebellum critics talked about authenticity of dialect representations. I show that antebellum readers and writers began discussing the authenticity of dialect representations not long after Seba Smith published his linguistically oblivious fictional preface to *Life and Writings* in 1833. The periodical record shows an emergent sentiment that providing a genuine record of speech was as important for dialect representations as telling a good joke. We will also see that, no less than in the Gilded Age, these conversations translated the socio-political obsessions of the period—many of which focus on the difference between American authors writing for American audiences and British authors for British readers—in terms of objective evaluations of authenticity in dialect representations. In the third section "Establishing Authority" I show that antebellum concerns with authenticity manifested themselves in a critical free-for-all in which any "amateur" reviewer could present his gut reaction to dialect authenticity as fact. This scenario created an authority vacuum that both Smith and Lowell tried to fill in their respective prefaces to their second volumes of dialect writing—Smith's 1859 *My Thirty Years* and Lowell's 1866 *Biglow Papers*. By comparing the way these authors attempted to leverage their prefaces' ability to tell the reader what their text was good for, I show that Lowell's triumph was utterly dependent on how he was able to sell himself (rather than sell the text) as an authority on Yankee dialect. In the fourth section, "Lowell's Legacy," I show that regionalist authors such as Edward Eggleston emulated Lowell's rhetoric of authenticity and authority in the prefaces to their regional dialect texts. Whereas Lowell's Introduction filled over fifty pages with

philological research into the roots of Yankee speech in order to prove his linguistic chops, Eggleston and his fellow local colorists developed a kind of shorthand for claims to linguistic authenticity and authority. I conclude with the section "New Questions about Authenticity" which contains reflections on how the ever-shifting shifting criteria for what dialect texts are good for makes for some interesting paradoxes in our own critical moment. By looking at the prefaces to some works of "plantation fiction" that employ Lowell's rhetoric of authenticity and expertise, I show that the same model that has convinced current critics that dialects became more serious after the Civil War, backfires today when it is used by overtly racist writers. While Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris saw themselves as heirs to Lowell no less than did Eggleston, their claims to linguistic authenticity in their representations of African American English often only increase the scorn heaped on them by contemporary critics.

ARTICULATING DIFFERENCES AMONG YANKEE DIALECT TEXTS

As part of the prehistory to his study of Gilded Age dialect writing, Gavin Jones lists the fictional characters who populated the antebellum American literary humor landscape: "Between the 1830s and the Civil War, dialect entered American magazines and newspapers as the natural language of political satire. Fictional characters such as Sam Slick, Jack Downing, Sut Lovingood, and Petroleum V. Nasby spoke in broad regional vernaculars that served a range of agendas" (37). Thomas Chandler Haliburton's Sam Slick and Smith's Jack Downing represent the "Yankee" dialect writers in this list with Lovingood and Nasby associated with the humor of the old Southwest.[27] Lowell's Yankee dialect humor receives special treatment in Jones's prehistory, when he argues

[27] Nasby is tricky here because he was not a Southerner speaking for Southerners, but this point more clearly illustrates the question crystallized by all literary dialects: who is making who speak for whom to what audience.

that "James Russell Lowell's *The Biglow Papers* (1848, 1866)" was "a pivotal text in the transition from its pre-Civil War glimmering to its post-Civil War blossoming" (39). It is abundantly clear that Lowell has become a different kind of dialect writer for us, but it is worth asking how different he was from Haliburton and Smith in his own time. It is also and always equally important that we resist eliding Lowell's two *Biglow Papers* as one text because it is precisely in the differences between these two texts and the changes in Lowell's public persona in the 18 years between publication dates that help us to see what was so different about him and the literary landscape after the Civil War.

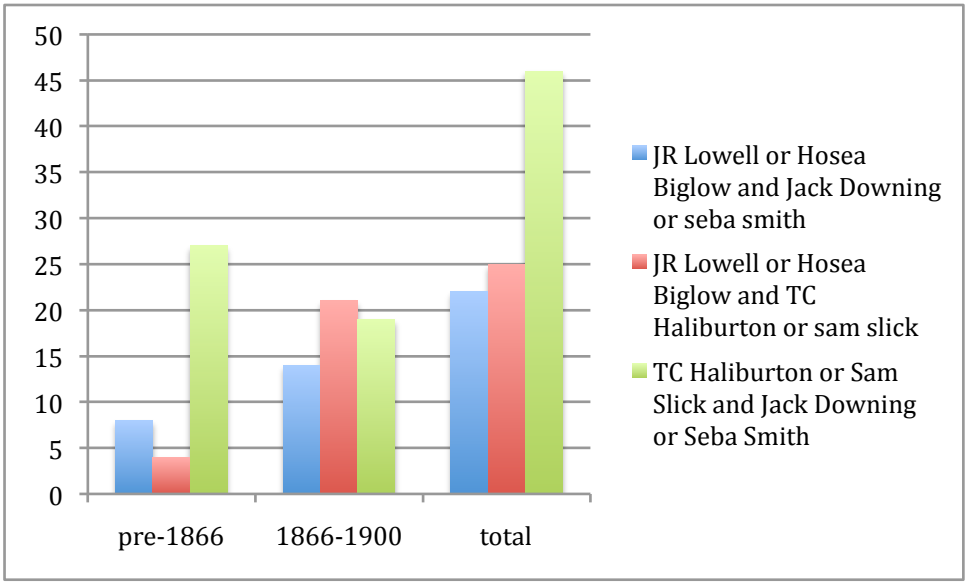
There are good reasons to lump James Russell Lowell with Smith and Haliburton and many critics do so based on the following similarities: each had a fictional character who gained significant fame in his own right (Smith's Major Jack Downing, Lowell's Hosea Biglow, and Haliburton's Sam Slick) and each offered tales filled with folksy Yankee witticisms on the political and social developments in the period before the Civil War. There are equally good reasons to separate Lowell from Smith and Haliburton (as Jones does above) for reasons other than the "seriousness" of his representations of speech. Lowell published his first volume of dialect writing in 1848, fifteen years after the first volumes of Major Jack Downing's letters and twelve years after Sam Slick's first "Clockmaker" tales. Furthermore, Lowell's dialect work is primarily in verse, a fact which literary historians frequently gloss over, but which is begging for further analysis.[28]

Using the invaluable American Periodical Series database allows for some broad strokes that will help us to generalize about these Yankee authors' relationship to

[28] A question for another day: Should dialect texts be lumped based on the speech they are trying to capture, or should they be lumped on the genre in which they put their representations of that speech? Does Lowell share more, then, with Paul Laurence Dunbar and even Robert Burns than he does with Haliburton or Smith?

emerging ideas about dialect as what a text is "good for" and their relationship to each other.[29] The following graph illustrates the number of hits produced by a Boolean search in the APS database using the following formula: "Author last name" OR "dialect character last name" AND "different author last name" OR "different character last name."[30]

Graph I: Co-Occurrence of Names/Characters of Yankee Dialect Writers



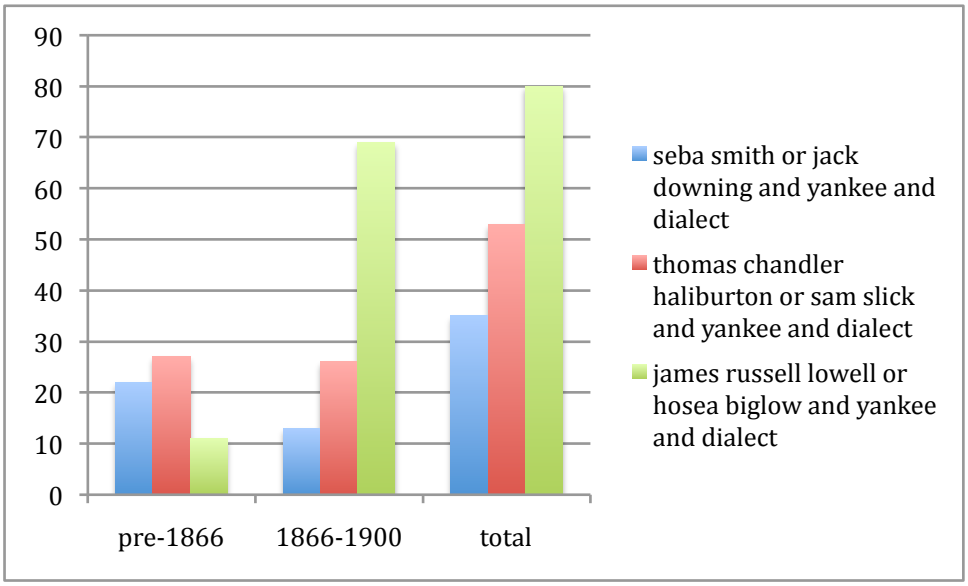
From this analysis, we can see two things: "Haliburton or Slick" appeared far more commonly with "Smith or Downing" than either did with "Lowell or Biglow" before

[29] I heard at the most recent MLA a panelist describing the APS as providing "an embarrassment of riches" for literary scholars. This is true, as the word search function in the immense database can turn up incredibly interesting examples from the 19th century to support any argument. This paper, then, will try to be modest and forthright about the need for better methods for using this resource and be humble about the generalizations that the data gathered can support. See Lorang and Zillig for a discussion of methodologies for using digital databases.

[30] I settled on these search terms after a lengthy trial and error process in which I tried to capture reviewers' tendency to name either the author or the dialect character or both. I also vetted my results by organizing them both chronologically and by "relevance" and sampling various results to be sure that these reviews did, in fact, discuss these texts and Yankee dialects. While there may be some false positives in these counts, my tests supported the validity of my methods.

1866 and that Lowell and Haliburton seemed more closely linked after the Civil War. This presents some justification for thinking of Lowell as a different kind of Yankee dialect in the antebellum period and suggests that Lowell's "Introduction" which explicitly refers to Slick caused these two texts to be associated with each other.[31] The next graph helps us consider to what degree these authors were associated with "Yankee dialect" by showing how often each author or character were mentioned in an article containing both "Yankee" and "dialect."

Graph II: Co-Occurrence of Terms "Yankee" and "dialect" with Names/Characters of Yankee Dialect Writers



Again, Lowell stands out, both as an author who received significantly more attention after the Civil War than before it and as an author who was more commonly associated with "Yankee dialect" than the other two after 1866. What is interesting in both these

[31] I heard at the most recent MLA a panelist describing the APS as providing "an embarrassment of riches" for literary scholars. This is true, as the word search function in the immense database can turn up incredibly interesting examples from the 19th century to support any argument. This chapter, then, will try to be modest and forthright about the need for better methods for using this resource and be humble about the generalizations that the data gathered can support.

graphs is that Lowell's 1848 *Biglow Papers* did not seem to get him noticed as an author of "Yankee dialect." These data point toward a suggestive pattern in which to explore what Lowell did or represented after the Civil War which distinguished him from what dialect authors did or represented before it. I argue that explorations are most fruitful when we break down distinctions based on authenticity as such and begin considering the influence that Lowell's 1866 Introduction and his privileged place as an academic authority—a place that he did not hold in 1848—had on the rhetoric of authenticity after the Civil War.[32]

THE OLD SERIOUSNESS

In order to create continuity between Lowell's "new seriousness," which Jones bases on the idea that his work provided a "genuine record of new speech," I trace in this section examples of what I call the "old seriousness" in discourse on antebellum humor texts from contemporary reviews. In doing so, I illustrate that some readers began taking authenticity of dialect seriously as early as the late 1830s. Michael Elliott has argued that "the practice of marking the locally authentic by orthographically reproducing linguistic dialects began well before the ascendancy of literary realism in the United States," but that "the dialect literature of the last two decades of the nineteenth century shifted the purpose of this strategy of writing" (64). I argue, however, that this shift in the purpose of this strategy was born of critical reactions to dialect writing in the antebellum period. The nature of the old seriousness depended on a faith that literary dialect texts could, in fact, "preserve" genuine modes of speech. We see the faith in dialect's mimetic capabilities in

[32] In a second test of my methods presented in this chapter two months later, my results produced some rather sharp deviations from the data I present here. While I am comfortable with hypothesis I present: that Lowell's role in criticism changed after his 1866 edition of the *Biglow Papers* and that his own criticism of Haliburton may have linked the two others to the exclusion of Smith, I have to admit that these are only preliminary steps toward developing a sound, repeatable methodology for using the APS to produce quantitative data in support of qualitative analysis and literary critical conjectures.

an 1838 *The American Monthly Magazine* review of Thomas Chandler Haliburton's "The Clockmaker," which starred his Yankee peddler, Sam Slick: "The Yankee dialect is preserved with a tolerable fidelity; indeed we know of no writer, except John Neal, who has copied the peculiarities of the "raal critter" with so much fidelity."[33] Rather than weighing in on the accuracy or inaccuracy of Haliburton's or Neal's representations, I focus on the rhetorical patterns employed by this reviewer. The primary rhetorical maneuver that comes through here is one that shows up again and again in antebellum literary reviews concerned with "genuine" speech: praise for Haliburton is expressed comparatively. If readers have already conceived that John Neal's Yankee speech is faithful to real Yankee speech (a fact which Bridgman roundly refutes above), pinning Haliburton to Neal functions as evidence that Haliburton records the real thing well enough.[34]

It should not surprise us, however, given the slipperiness inherent in using one author to support claims about another, that Haliburton was on the receiving end of negative comparisons as well, as is the case with the following review from *Putnam's* in 1854:

> There is an individual who calls himself Sam Slick, but whose real name is Haliburton, who writes tales and sketches of American life on purpose for the English market. He is a Nova Scotian by birth or residence, and knows about as much of genuine Yankee character as one half of the comic actors who attempt to impersonate it on stage, i.e., he knows a few enormous exaggerations and nothing more. His representations, however, are received in England as the true thing, and nine out of ten of the current slang expressions, which the English ascribe to Yankees are taken from his books, never having been heard of in Yankee land. (Putnam's Aug 1854: 227)

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[33] Red flags should go up for us, having already dealt with Melville's deconstruction of literary 'fidelity" to real life in the previous chapter.

[34] What makes the rhetoric of comparison here interesting is that this reviewer's paradigm of true Yankee speech, John Neal, is the fall guy for Bridgman's exegesis on the failures of antebellum humor to capture speech accurately.

This review, rather than pinning Haliburton's representations to John Neal's in order to support an argument about their accuracy, associates Haliburton's work with representations of the "stage Yankee" in order to discredit it.[35] Again, the point is not that this review has any particular insight into the actual authenticity of Haliburton's representations, but that he follows the same rhetorical patterns in support of his evaluation. We also see another wrinkle emerging in the rhetoric of authentic representation: consideration of the author's biography and his intended audience as key to evaluating the dialect's merit. Haliburton's Nova Scotian heritage and his popularity in England's literary marketplaces are used to devalue his ability to represent Yankee speech accurately. This reviewer's problem is that Haliburton, an author ignorant of the speech he represents, has entered into a closed circuit with ignorant readers, thereby producing false positives in the authenticity test. This maneuver not only reveals the truth of Jones's statement about the overtly political nature of antebellum dialect reviews, but it also foreshadows the closed circuit of an expert author and informed readers that Lowell authorized in his 1866 edition.

In a similar rhetorical structure, a reviewer for *Fraser's* magazine from 1850 uses Haliburton to boost his assessment of Lowell's dialectological prowess in his antebellum *Biglow Papers*:

> The *Biglow Papers* are imaginary epistles from a New England farmer, and contain some of the best specimens extant of the 'Yankee' or New England dialect—better than Haliburton's, for Sam Slick sometimes mixes Southern, Western, and even English vulgarities with his Yankee.

The social-scientific vocabulary ("specimens") underscores the fact that readers took dialect writing seriously based on their potential to preserve truly American modes of speech and demands that we find the roots of Elliot's analysis that "the methodology of

[35] For a classic history of the "stage Yankee," see Louis Eich's "The Stage Yankee."

professional, distanced observation enacted a position of objectivity as a means of establishing discursive authority" (xvi) before the Civil War. It is not necessary for this critic to provide any examples of what constitutes "Southern, Western, and even English vulgarities," but again, Haliburton's ties to England seem to suggest a particular deficiency in his representations.

While Lowell often provides current criticism with the exemplary paradigm against which the failures of his fellow antebellum humor writers are judged, this was not always the case for antebellum reviews, such as the following from *Emerson's Weekly* of Lowell's antebellum dialect work (published in his 1848 First Series of *The Biglow Papers* and anthologized in 1858's *The Poetical Works of James Russell Lowell*) in which the reviewer takes Lowell to task for the very errors that we saw being attached to Haliburton above:

> The Biglow papers are hardly worthy to be preserved, in the serious revised works of any author, who as in this case collects his own material, and labels it for immortality. Grotesqueness coupled with rodomontade are the lowest elements of wit, and endurable only in the passing, ephemereal literature of the newspaper. To write bad spelling and bad grammar is not to write Yankee. We contend that the only genuine Yankee delineations are those of Major Downing, which do not consist in mere out of the way modes of expression, but in a subtile quaintness of thought, which under the simplest language conveys a homely truth or a statesman-like idea. (666)

Preservation informs the logic of this evaluation, and in this case Lowell is cast negatively against the "genuine" representations of our old friend Major Jack Downing. The reviewer goes on to suggest that the speech of Smith's Downing, not that of Lowell's Hosea Biglow is the display case in which Yankee speech is preserved:

> Bad spelling is an accident in this species of literature, needful to preserve the quaintness of pronunciation common in secluded localities, combined with a certain obliquity of thought, not moral idea, native to the Yankee, and to him involving no sentiment of humor, but producing in the minds of the spectator comic impressions. It is needless to say, that the progress of railroads and

> telegraphs wires is fast obliterating the distinctive shades of the Yankee character and ere long he will only live in the writings of Major Downing. (666)

It is also worth considering here how this reviewer handles the inversion of authorial intention and reader response from humor to authenticity. Whereas the earlier model of American humor rested on the idea that an author aimed to give the audience a chuckle with his representations of quaint speech and naïve provincial logic, this review assumes that the author is tasked with representing the real speech and logic of his vernacular characters and it is up to the readers to find the humor in them. Major Jack Downing's importance here is not comedic, but rather anthropologic, and if what is preserved is humorous, that is a peripheral bonus for readers.

ESTABLISHING AUTHORITY

We have already seen that Smith's first Major Jack preface was unconcerned with or ignorant of the potential for dialect writing to be taken seriously as an exercise of linguistic preservation. We have likewise seen that this idea of "preservation" became part of the periodical record before 1840. The second major edition of Major Jack's writings, *My Thirty Years Out of the Senate* (1859), reveals how much the emergent idea of linguistic authenticity changed Smith's attitude toward his work. Whereas the silliness of Major Jack's fictional preface was part of the point—a man who didn't know what a preface was ill-equipped for a position of political influence—the preface to the 1859 edition took the task of articulating the book's importance seriously and engaged the rhetorical conventions of authenticity and authority in an advanced way. In the preface to the 1859 edition we see Smith convinced that linguistic authenticity was a major aspect of what his text was good for and concerned with consolidating the authority to expound on how good it was in this regard. The important point here is that rather than turning over a fictional simpleton, he turns it over to an impartial "publisher," who was, in fact,

Smith himself; the book was published by Oaksmith & Company, which he had run with his wife Elizabeth Oakes Smith and their four sons since 1858. (Mott, *History of American Magazines* 1850-1865 p. 450)

> But besides the valuable political and historical information, interesting to the old and instructive to the young, that will be found embodied in this great work of Major Downing, there is another important reason why it should be given to the public, and why the publishers take pride and pleasure in presenting the work in a dress and with embellishments worthy of the subject-and that is, the universally admitted fact, that the writings of the genuine original Major Downing present the best and truest exposition of the peculiar Yankee dialect of the Anglo-Saxon language that there is extant.

There are a number of maneuvers here that show the rhetoric of authenticity and authority gaining critical mass. First of all, the comparative has become a superlative with the terms "best" and "truest"; second of all, these superlatives—one of quality, one of accuracy—suggest the growing confluence between the anthropological merit with aesthetic value as what texts dialect texts are good for; third, the evaluation's socio-political roots are hiding in plain sight with the emphasis on "Anglo-Saxon' language." Even more interesting is the ways in which authority to pronounce the quality of the dialect is constructed. First of all, by publishing his own text and providing it a "Publisher's Preface," Smith is doing a kind of dialect humor "astroturfing." That is, Smith leans on the "universal" belief that Major Jack's dialect is the real thing, again showing that the locus of authority for dialect texts was still decentralized. An author, at least this author, could not yet claim that the dialect presented in the text is the real thing because he is the most qualified to represent the real thing; instead, conventional wisdom is invoked in much the same way that Bridgman's history is invoked by many of the critics who came after him.

Furthering the importance of the decentralized nature of authority on the reality of dialect representations is the fact that Smith quotes from his reviewers in the same way that Black Guinea implores his inquisitors to go ask around to find someone who will speak for him. Smith includes the following in his preface:

> The old New York Mirror, March 23, 1839, speaking of some of the writings of Major Downing, said: "These are the most graphic and really the best Yankee papers we have ever seen, or ever expect to see, let who will write them." The New York Courier and Enquirer, July 3, 1839, in speaking of the writings of the Major, used the following language: "There is no doubt that the author is the best painter of Yankee peculiarities that ever wrote. He is true to nature and never caricatures, but without caricaturing is most amusing.

There are two essential points to be gleaned from this 1859 preface. The first is that writers and readers functioned as complementary agents in the establishment of a text's authenticity. In this case, the seriousness with which authenticity in dialect was taken came not originally from the author in a preface but from the critical responses to the texts. These responses were then woven back into a claim about Smith's authority to write authentically. While Bridgman correctly identifies the mutually reinforcing nature of "serious concern for authenticity," the dates of these reviews suggest that these transactions were at work long before the conventional landmark at the end of the Civil War. The question remains as to why Smith's 1859 preface is not a landmark text in the study of "seriousness" in literary dialects and this helps us to articulate why Lowell's "Introduction" is our paradigm for the period. Lowell was better able to centralize the authority to write authentically on himself. We can see this transition occurring in the fact that Lowell had become prestigious between 1848 and 1866. We can also see how his two prefaces show him realizing the potential of being the expert reader of one's own work.

I argue that Lowell's 1866 preface, the key pivot point for critics who try to articulate a fundamental change in how dialects were represented, in fact has distracted critics from close analysis of dialect representations on the page in favor of responses to the paratextual statements that conditioned their receptions. What follows is a comparison between Lowell's 1848 "playful" fictional preface and his "serious," authorial 1866 "Introduction" which illuminates why the later was so successful in effecting this change. While Lowell's preface to his First Series of *Biglow Papers* was acutely aware of the fickleness of literary critics, it wasn't until the Second Series that he was able to pin down one area on which fickleness could not apply: academic objectivity about his representations of speech. Lowell's First Series is, much like Major Jack Downing's first volume of letters, a nonserious book with serious political motivations. While Lowell was gravely concerned about the Mexican War and chose Hosea Biglow to voice those concerns in his folksy speech, this is without a doubt a book of humor that announces itself as such (as Smith does in his preface to *Life and Writings* by questioning the practice of writing the first two pages last) by lampooning the conventions of serious books. The First Series opens with a section entitled "Notices of an Independent Press" in which Lowell's fictional and overly pedantic editor, Homer Wilbur, explains his reasoning for making up a series of reviews for the first edition rather than waiting to attach them to the second edition:

> I have observed, reader (bene-or male-volent, as it may happen), that it is customary to append to the second editions of books, and to the second works of authors, short sentences commendatory of the first, under the title of _Notices of the Press_. These, I have been given to understand, are procurable at certain established rates, payment being made either in money or advertising patronage by the publisher, or by an adequate outlay of servility on the part of the author. Considering these things with myself, and also that such notices are neither intended, nor generally believed, to convey any real opinions, being a purely ceremonial accompaniment of literature, and resembling certificates to the virtues

> of various morbiferal panaceas, I conceived that it would be not only more economical to prepare a sufficient number of such myself, but also more immediately subservient to the end in view to prefix them to this our primary edition rather than to await the contingency of a second, when they would seem to be of small utility.

By mocking the custom of attaching critical blurbs to books to convince readers they are about to read something good, Lowell is announcing his full understanding of how extratextual material may be manipulated in order to produce certain effects on readers. At this point in his career as a literary dialect writer, however, lampooning "ceremonial accompaniment of literature" is an end in and of itself. As I have suggested, his mastery of the potential of these ceremonial accompaniments, particularly when authenticity is at stake, is Lowell's true legacy in the development of "serious" dialect writing in the nineteenth century, but Lowell would not fully assert that mastery until the Second Series and its Introduction.

We can see Lowell's understanding of both the stakes involved in discussing the quality of nonstandard speech in literature and the political implications that underpinned such discussions in the first two phony reviews for the First Series. It should not surprise us that the first two reviews attach the quality of speech in the volume to larger political issues. The first review (or pre-view as the case may be), attributed to the Universal Littery [*sic*] Society praises the nationalistic and democratic aspect of the Yankee speech: "We rejoice to meet with an author national enough to break away from the slavish deference, too common among us, to English grammar and orthography...." while the second, attributed to "Higginbottomopolis Snapping-turtle" understands the very same deviation from English grammar and orthography to embody an anti-American, pro-British sentiment:

> A collection of the merest balderdash and doggerel that it was ever our bad fortune to lay eyes on. The author is a vulgar buffoon, and the editor a talkative,

> tedious old fool. We use strong language, but should any of our readers peruse the book, (from which calamity Heaven preserve them!) they will find reasons for it thick as the leaves of Vallum-brozer, or, to use a still more expressive comparison, as the combined heads of author and editor. The work is wretchedly got up....We should like to know how much _British gold_ was pocketed by this libeller of our country and her purest patriots.

While Lowell's playful send up of the literary critics of his time helps to increase the humorous slant of the volume, these jabs reveal an acute awareness on Lowell's part of how global issues can attach themselves to responses to nonstandard representations of speech. It is this awareness, only thinly veiled behind the irreverent drollery in the First Series, I argue, that spurred him to take control of just what could be said about his Yankee dialect in the Second Series. By explicitly announcing that he had "recorded the Yankee dialect with scrupulous accuracy" (Bridgman 50) in his Introduction to the Second Series, and backing that announcement up with dozens of pages tracing the roots of Yankee speech in earlier works of British literature, Lowell preemptively took the teeth out of any attack on his accuracy as a means to attack his politics.

However neatly the timeline functions with Lowell's Second Series forming the turning point toward seriousness after the Civil War, it is simply not the case that Lowell did not take his Yankee dialect seriously in the First Series. In fact, his fictional editor Homer Wilbur's introduction to the First Series provides the germ for all the assertions that Lowell would say for himself in the 1866 volume. First, he argues against the idea that the Yankee dialect has nothing but a vulgar pedigree:

> It remains to speak of the Yankee dialect. And, first, it may be premised, in a general way, that any one much read in the writings of the early colonists need not be told that the far greater share of the words and phrases now esteemed peculiar to New England, and local there, were brought from the mother country. A person familiar with the dialect of certain portions of Massachusetts will not fail to recognize, in ordinary discourse, many words now noted in English vocabularies as archaic, the greater part of which were in common use about the time of the

> King James translation of the Bible. Shakespeare stands less in need of a glossary to most New-Englanders than to many a native of the Old Country.

After establishing the validity of Yankee speech by connecting it to the greatest religious and secular works of English literature, Lowell, through Wilbur, goes on to assert that Yankee dialect in the volume to follow is equally validated: "As regards the provincialisms to be met with in this volume, I may say that the reader will not find one which is not (as I believe) either native or imported with the early settlers, nor one which I have not, with my own ears, heard in familiar use." By having Wilbur claim that he can personally verify the genuineness of the features that will appear in the voice of Hosea Biglow, Lowell reveals his understanding that evaluations of literary dialect representations depend largely on who the author is; unlike Haliburton, whose Nova Scotian citizenship hindered his ability to record real Yankee speech for Lowell and for others, Wilbur can assure his readers that what they "hear" in *The Biglow Papers* they would hear if they were walking the streets of a Massachusetts town. Bolstering his claims to knowledge of the dialect in question, Wilbur goes on to enumerate "a few general rules for the reader's guidance." I reproduce just the first two of the seven provided to give the reader a sense of what an increasingly serious approach to dialect authenticity Lowell took with the First Series in 1848, seventeen years before the end of the Civil War:

1. The genuine Yankee never gives the rough sound to the _r_ when he can help it, and often displays considerable ingenuity in avoiding it even before a vowel.
2. He seldom sounds the final _g_, a piece of self-denial, if we consider his partiality for nasals. The same of the final _d_, as _han'_ and _stan'_ for _hand_ and _stand_.

From Wilbur's Introduction, we can see the hurdles that Lowell understood must be overcome in an environment where reviewers were beginning to laud or damn a work of literature on the basis of authenticity of dialect. For Lowell is incumbent on the serious author of dialect to:

1. Establish that "vulgarities" are examples of a more pure English
2. Establish that the author has native knowledge of the dialect in question.
3. Establish that the literary dialect has been scrupulously vetted against the real dialect
4. Establish a guide for readers so that they can recognize the authenticity of the dialect they read

These are the same tenets of the Introduction to the Second Series that was so much more successful in convincing Lowell's contemporaries in 1866 (and modern critics as well) that he was doing something quite new. While Lowell seems to have been ahead of his time in the First Series of *The Biglow Papers* by directly addressing the alchemy that produces judgments on the authenticity of dialect, these revelations were presented in extratextual material that was still firmly grounded in the conventions of humor as represented by Major Jack Downing's preface. Homer Wilbur's long-winded pedantry obscures the seriousness with which Lowell took the practice of recording literary dialect and enters him into the critical fray on humor in which reviewers could justify comparisons that held Biglow's Yankee speech inferior to Downing's and Haliburton's. What makes Lowell's Second Series more serious is that he, the author, takes the task of insuring that his dialect is received properly more seriously by writing the "academic" Introduction in his own name.

With regard to the pedigree of the Yankee speech he records, Lowell elaborates on Wilbur's passing reference to the King James Bible and to Shakespeare by providing

an enormous treatise on the roots of Yankee speech in English literature in his Introduction to the Second Series. This extensive exposition allows Lowell to debunk any potential concerns about his vulgarity by concluding, "I have done all I wished in respect to pronunciation, if I have proved that where we are vulgar, we have the countenance of very good company." With regards to Lowell's authority to write such a dialect, he doubles his claim to credibility by asserting that his native knowledge of the dialect is augmented by his later "study" of it, a claim that hearkens back to Jones's point about the Introduction's "academic weight":

> To me the dialect was native, was spoken all about me when a boy, at a time when an Irish day-laborer was as rare as an American one now. Since then I have made a study of it so far as opportunity allowed. But when I write in it, it is as in a mother tongue, and I am carried back far beyond any studies of it to long-ago noonings in my father's hay-fields, and to the talk of Sam and Job over their jug of _blackstrap_ under the shadow of the ash-tree which still dapples the grass whence they have been gone so long.

It is no coincidence that Lowell's assertion of his own native knowledge of Yankee dialect, augmented by study, comes immediately after his critical comment on Haliburton's literary dialect which he found to be "a libel on the Yankee character, and a complete falsification of Yankee modes of speech." By placing his own biographical credibility next to the dubious position of a Nova Scotian and British subject trying to represent the Yankee character genuinely through his speech, Lowell again reveals his keen understanding that if the first rule of evaluating a literary dialect rests on its authenticity, the second rule is that authenticity is best expressed comparatively. While the superiority of his First Series's dialect over pretenders like Haliburton was tacitly embedded in the ramblings of his fictional editor, Lowell has made these claims explicit in the Second Series and signed off on them himself.

As for his instructions for the reader to read the real thing correctly, Lowell makes a very bold maneuver in his Introduction to the Second Series, by implying that a reader's ability to appreciate the Yankee dialect forthcoming has actually taken a back seat to the author's concerns that the speech was recorded accurately. He writes: "A word more on pronunciation. I have endeavored to express this so far as I could by the types, taking such pains as, I fear, may sometimes make the reading harder than need be." Again, if Lowell's seriousness plays an important role in the development of realism, it lies much more in statements like this than in the actual orthographic decisions he made while composing his work. Here, Lowell has, in the words of Elliott, taken "the discipline out of the hands of the self-taught and put it into those of persons trained in research universities" (xvi) by suggesting that the goal of literary dialect is less about the approval or enjoyment of the reader and more about scrupulous accuracy, even to the detriment of the reading experience. Rather than explicitly laying out the rules that a reader could follow to recognize the features of speech in his writing, Lowell implies that the dialect's authenticity is an end already achieved and if readers don't recognize that authenticity, the problem is with them and their limitations as readers of speech.

Major Jack's laissez-faire attitude as to what his readers might find in his volume of letters seems just another example of his comical literary naivete pointing out his serious political naivete:

> A preface! says I, what in nater is that? Why, says he, it is something to fill up the two first pages with. But, says I, aint the two first pages filled up yet? I thought we had jest got through the last page; I hope our cake aint turning to dough again.

What Smith couldn't have understood at the time, and what Lowell very clearly understood in 1866 when it came time for him to publish his Second Series, is that when authenticity of dialect representation has taken on literary value for readers, a preface or

an introduction is not an unnecessary appendage to the body of the text to be lampooned, but rather an essential document that allows an author to head off any concerns a reader may have about the authenticity of speech represented. Whereas Smith's playful 1833 fictional preface helped to further his very serious goal of criticizing the politics of Jacksonian America, it did very little to establish him as a serious writer of Yankee dialect.

LOWELL'S LEGACY

It is perhaps no surprise that a reviewer from *The Critic* in 1887 sums up Lowell's place in the literary dialect tradition by asserting that "competent judges appear to be agreed that the dialect is reproduced with utmost purity, and that as a specimen of the vernacular idiom the Biglow Papers are infinitely superior to Sam Slick or Major Downing." Given the fact that Smith made a similar point about himself in his 1859 preface, we might conclude that if Lowell has emerged from the dark ages of antebellum humor as a serious writer who helped spawn the first seriously American works of literature, he has done so on the strength of his ability to present himself as the most competent judge of his own work, and surveys of criticism on the developments of dialect literature seem to echo the consensus that he willed into being in his prefatory material.

The central place that Lowell holds for 19th century American literary scholars today in the development of the distinctly American genres of local color and realism is mirrored by the respect he received from those dialect writers who came after him. His exalted place among those who, like Eggleston, considered him a "protorealist" is evidenced by the note for an "Authors Readings" event in November of 1887 in *The Critic* which announces that

> the affair is under the management of the Executive Committee of the American Copyright League, and Mr. James Russell Lowell will occupy the chair at both readings as the League's President…Monday's program will include a reading by Dr. Edward Eggleston from a manuscript not yet published. Dr. Eggleston will be followed by Mr. Clemens (Mark Twain)." (278)

Others scheduled to read at the event read like a who's who of American local color and dialect fiction: James Whitcomb Riley, George Washington Cable, Richard Malcom Johnston, William Dean Howells, Charles Dudley Warner, and Thomas Nelson Page. Lowell's place in the chair at this event is not the only signal that he occupied an extremely influential role for those authors coming after him who took their dialects seriously. While it would be difficult to track Lowell's influence on the orthographic representations of nonstandard speech in the works of Eggleston (whom Jones identifies as a protégé of Lowell) and the work of plantation writers like Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page, a look at the prefatory material supplied by these authors in their literary dialect texts suggests that Lowell's formula of asserting the authenticity of a literary dialect is undeniably present.

Consider the "Preface" to Edward Eggleston's *Hoosier Schoolmaster* (1871), a foundational dialect text of the period, which a reviewer of its second edition in 1892 reminisced about as follows: "It should be remembered that this was the forerunner and perhaps the best of the now numerous dialect stories." (The Art Amateur. Aug. 1893: pg 74). Eggleston's "Preface" is as much an homage to Lowell as it is a prefatory piece on his own novel. He writes,

> To Mr. Lowell belongs the distinction of being the only one of our most eminent authors and the only one of our most eminent scholars who has given the careful attention to American dialect. But while I have not ventured to discuss the provincialisms of the Indiana backwoods, I have been careful to preserve the true *usus loquendi* of each locution.

Eggleston's confidence in the power of invoking Lowell as a precursor is staggering. Not only has Lowell managed to make "careful attention to American dialects" a literary boon, his name has become, for Eggleston, a kind of shorthand between authors and readers about the seriousness of dialect they are about to read. Even though Lowell has written in Yankee dialect and Eggleston in Hoosier, Lowell's having already established the possibilities for serious dialect writing took significant pressure off those authors who would try to convince their readers that they too have been "careful." Of course the Latin here doesn't hurt either; since Eggleston has already suggested that the language contained in the Hoosier Schoolmaster is the natural extension of his personal experiences, his education can only help the impression that he has, like Lowell, polished native knowledge with scrupulous study: "some of those who have spoken generous words of the School-master and his friends have suggested that the story is an autobiography. But it is not, save that in the sense in which every work of art is an autobiography: in that it is the result of the experience and observation of the writer." Experience and observation combine, as they did for Lowell, to make a powerful argument that his readers could trust the veracity of the speech they were about to read.

NEW QUESTIONS ON AUTHORITY AND AUTHENTICITY

I will treat perhaps the most famous scion of Lowell's rhetoric of authority and authenticity—Mark Twain's "Explanatory" to *Huck Finn*—in the next chapter. I conclude this chapter, however, with some reflections on what this rhetoric meant for the work of two later practitioners of local color fiction, the plantation writers Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris—each of whom were present at the "Author's Readings" event Lowell chaired—and what their claims to authority and authenticity in what has come to be (justifiably read) as an overtly racist genre. Each employs the kinds of strategies that

Lowell pioneered in his Introduction by asserting his own personal familiarity of the dialect in question and then making a claim to an expertise that the reader can either trust or can be instructed to recognize. In *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings*, Harris, like Seba Smith's Major Jack Downing and Lowell's Homer Wilbur in the First Series begins with a comment on the conventions of the humorous preface before, like Lowell in the Second Series, suggesting that the dialect used in the volume is not merely for kicks:

> I am advised by my publishers that this book is to be included in their catalogue of humorous publications, and this friendly warning gives me an opportunity to say that however humorous it may be in effect, its intention is perfectly serious; and, even if it were otherwise, it seems to me that a volume written wholly in dialect must have its solemn, not to say melancholy, features.

What Harris's preface most obviously shares with Lowell's is the complete confidence and absolute terms the authenticity of the literary dialect is expressed in to the comparative determinant of his humorous precursors and present rivals. Harris writes that "the dialect, it will be observed, is wholly different from that of the Hon. Pompey Smash and his literary descendents, and different also from the intolerable misrepresentations of the minstrel stage, but it is at least phonetically genuine." Whether any literary dialect can be "wholly different" from any other remains questionable;[36] after Lowell, though, the idea that such a claim could be made on the basis of "genuine" phonetics, seems unremarkable.[37]

Thomas Nelson Page enters this authenticity echo chamber in his prefatory material to his most famous work, *In Ole Virginia*, dedicating it, "To My People This Fragmentary Record of Their Life is Dedicated." Unlike Haliburton who was accused of

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[36] I take up this issue in Chapter 6 with quantitative comparisons of how standard and nonstandard orthographies behaved on the pages of Page's Harris's and Chesnutt's "plantation" texts.

[37] I take up the most famous and most debated example of such supreme confidence in orthographies ability to capture the peculiarities of spoken dialects, Mark Twain's "Explanatory" to Huck Finn in the next chapter.

dabbling in the character and speech across a national boundary, and like Lowell whose Yankee roots play such an important part in his Introduction to the Second Series, Page explicitly marks himself as an insider in the dialect community he is representing (the possessive "my" is interesting here, as the only dialect characters in the stories are slaves not slave owners, like Page was; this kind of white ventriloquism is dealt with by Michele Birnbaum among others) and implicitly suggests that his knowledge of "his people" is best expressed in his knowledge of their language. Michael Elliott reads this dedication as follows:

> When Page himself dedicates *In Ole Virginia: Marse Chan and Other Stories* (1887) to 'My People,' the text does not refer to biologically inherited whiteness but to a socially constructed way of behaving, a culture that Page believes necessarily to include both white masters and black slaves. (68)

We might wonder if it makes sense to apply this same kind of reading to Lowell's insistence that he grew up speaking, as a mother tongue, the language of "American" laborers as opposed to Irish ones—, given his privileged place as a vested Lowell. The question, I raise, then, is just how different are the processes by which cultural differences and identities attach themselves to dialect writing? Are they dependent on the rhetorical practices or the groups that are being delineated as the same and different?

If the answer is, "rhetorical practices," Page and Lowell are much closer than we have realized. For example, Page provides a "Note" to the text that offers the kind of rules for reading Yankee speech that we saw presented by Homer Wilbur in Lowell's Introduction to the First Series:

> The dialect of the negroes of Eastern Virginia differs totally from that of the Southern negroes, and in some material points from that of those located farther west.

> The elision is so constant that it is impossible to produce the exact sound, and in some cases it has been found necessary to subordinate the phonetic arrangements to intelligibility.
>
> The following rules may, however, aid the reader:
>
> The final consonant is rarely sounded. Adverbs, prepositions, and short words are frequently slighted, as is the possessive. The letter *r* is not usually rolled except when used as a substitute for *th*, but is pronounced *ah*.
>
> For instance, the following is a fair representation of the peculiarities cited:
>
> The sentence, "It was curious, he said, he wanted to go into the other army," would sound: "'Twuz cu-yus, he say, he wan'(t) (to) go in(to) 'turr ah-my."

As with Harris's assertions about his literary dialect differing wholly from Pompey Smash's (recall Lowell's charge that Haliburton's Yankee speech was a "complete falsification"), Page resorts to absolutes when suggesting that the "dialect of the of the negroes of Eastern Virginia differs totally from that of the Southern negroes." As with Page's statement about "my people" quoted above, this sentence opens up a dizzying set of possible and overlapping readings. Presumably, Page is suggesting that the literary dialect his readers will encounter in *In Ole Virginia* differs from the familiar "thick-lipped Negro" character that a reviewer for *The Literary World* in an 1887 article entitled "American Dialect" identified, along with "the oily creole, the nasal New Englander, the lanky mountaineer," as a part of the "American soil." Yet, for contemporary critics, Page's efforts to record the speech of former slaves and to try to distinguish them from other literary representations of slaves from other regions, goes unrecognized by critics who see his fiction as contributing to the "racist ideology" that "the 'old-time' darky' of the plantation was superior to the Negro of the New South, and emancipation, it was argued, had ushered in an age of childlike loss of direction, mental and physical decline, and a propensity for violence on the part of blacks" (Sundquist 336). In other words, even if Page thought he was distinguishing "his people" from the stock image of the "old-time

darky," he has become the standard bearer for those who constructed that image. I am not saying that this judgment is not justified; truly, *In Ole Virginia* is painful for modern readers to sit through. I do, however, want to reflect on the fact that the same paratextual moves that Lowell makes in his Introduction, the ones we praise as the pillars of the realist tradition and the ones that have relegated antebellum texts to an unimportant prehistorical aside come back to us in horror when we see Thomas Nelson Page using them to assert the cultural and linguistic identity of "his people," the ones whose rights he did so much to strip away.

The larger point of these reflections is that as long as "authenticity" of representation remains an uncomplicated "good" for dialect texts—aesthetically, ethnographically, politically—our critical logics will always be exposed to the kinds of paradoxes and even hypocrisies revealed in the modern unilateral conclusions that Lowell's literary dialects reveal a "new seriousness." Indeed, a 1928 linguistic study of Lowell's Yankee speech in *American Speech* found problems with Lowell because he did not follow his own rules and did not maintain consistency with the features he employed (Killheffer 222-236). When applied to the marginal literary histories of Yankee dialect humor, these paradoxes and elisions do not, unfortunately, suggest major critical problems. Critical problems and opportunities for new research arise when the questions I raise about the essentially rhetorical and conventional nature of our arguments about which dialect representations are serious and which are not run into the socio-political conclusions we want to make about the racial politics of representation. Lowell became the first serious dialect writer not because he was the first serious dialect writer. For this reason, he and his fellow humorists deserve a much more serious look.

Chapter 3: Which May Pass For Whatever It May Prove to Be Worth: A Painstaking History of Responses to Twain's Explanatory

In *Before Culture*, Brad Evans asks a number of pointed questions about what happened to the antebellum "categories of difference…that had been put into doubt by fundamental realignments within American society" in the decades after the Civil War:

> What then separated 'the Negro' from 'Anglo-Saxon America' without the institution of slavery? What differentiated the Indian 'savage' from white 'civilization' in the absence of a Western frontier? What defined 'national character' if the nation included territories overseas, sectional differences between the States, differences in custom and language between regions, and unassimilated immigrant nations within the nation?

For Evans, these questions prompt a trenchant study of the ways that ideas of "culture" and disciplines in the social sciences that articulated cultural differences helped to draw and redraw socio-political lines in the second half of the nineteenth century. My work on James Russell Lowell and American dialect humor in the previous chapter suggests that literary representations of dialect and their audience's responses to them had often participated in drawing the antebellum period's own categories of difference—between, for example, "real" American authors and readers and their British-subject counterparts. As such, my discussion on competing rhetorics of authority and authenticity, particularly as they revealed themselves in paratextual material such as Lowell's "Introduction" to the *Biglow Papers*, helps us to contextualize the ways that Gilded Age literature articulated its relationship to the larger cultural divisions that were embodied in the divisions between standard and nonstandard orthographies. Given the fundamental premise of this study, that evaluation of linguistic authenticity in nineteenth century dialect texts largely constitutes a confidence game—one that, I argue, we should describe and move beyond rather than participate in—we might ask, after Evans, "What happens to our assessments

of the dialect representations after we abandon the idea that determining 'authenticity' is a plausible critical goal?"

Mark Twain's "Explanatory" note to *Huck Finn* is perhaps the most famous (and most answered) call to play the confidence game built into questions of linguistic authenticity in dialect literature:

> In this book a number of dialects are used, to wit: the Missouri negro dialect; the extremist form of the backwoods South-Western dialect; the ordinary 'Pike County' dialect; and four modified varieties of this last. The shadings have not been done in a haphazard fashion, or by guess-work; but painstakingly, and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech.
>
> I make this explanation for the reason that without it many readers would suppose that all these characters were trying to talk alike and not succeeding.
>
> THE AUTHOR

"Explanatory" presents readers of *Huck Finn* with two questions, one of authorial intention and the other of textual fact: (1) Is Twain serious? and (2) Are there seven distinct dialect representations within the text? As I will show, however, modern critics have often attempted to answer these questions by seeking objective proof of the authenticity of one or more of Twain's dialect representations. Again, I will show that authenticity has intervened as the mediating logic for critical efforts to connect textual details to larger concerns about who the author is and how his novel fits into the literary and socio-political climate from which it came. While Twain invites referenda on the authenticity of representation by emphasizing his personal familiarity with the varieties of speech he enumerates, his prefatory goal, as stated in the last sentence of "Explanatory," is to configure his desired relationship between the reader and the text rather than the between the text and "real" speech. Readers, Twain tells us, are not responsible for testing the authenticity of each dialect representation against real speech;

instead, they are responsible for recognizing and appreciating different dialect representations on the page.

The long history of how readers have responded to "Explanatory" provides two important opportunities to pursue the post-authenticity criticism I advocate in this dissertation: (1) A metacritical look at *how* and *why* readers have tried to answer the unanswerable question of authenticity in literary dialect representations; and (2) A new look at how the tools and methods that critics have used to prove authenticity might be re-appropriated to produce descriptive literary dialect data. The necessity for a new approach to "Explanatory," one based on open-ended questions and descriptive data, reveals itself in the critical impasses that criticism on the novel has produced. In a 2002 review of seven critical works on Twain, Peter Schmidt echoed Toni Morrison's famous claim that "the brilliance of *Huck Finn* is that it *is* the argument it raises" when he suggested that the critical disagreements that Twain's work generates "must be counted among the strengths of Twain's criticism, not a sign of confusion regarding method or goals. It's pretty much true, after all, that the greater the writer, the more he or she generates opposing ways of reading." Jonathan Arac (whom Schmidt reviews) might point out the socio-political constructions that have forced us to take these assertions about Twain's greatness as an excuse to elide the hard questions that the novel presents about Twain's (and our own) racial politics. I suggest that literary dialect representations and the methods and goals we bring to them exemplify the phenomenon of avoiding difficult questions in order to indulge our critical desires. As a result, the open-ended questions that "Explanatory" poses—how serious Twain is about his claims, how a reader might tell the different dialect representations apart—have been reduced to objective "yes/no" questions: Is Twain serious? Are there seven dialects represented? Thus, the "yes" critics have little to say to the "no" critics even as they both agree on Twain's

literary greatness. Of course there is much more at stake here than jokes and counting dialects; these "yes/no" binaries have also informed work such as Shelley Fisher Fishkin's which addresses the "Jim Dilemma" as a linguistic question of whether or not Twain's representation of Jim's speech is sympathetic. Thus, the complex question of Twain's racial politics has, at times, become confused with an overly simple and ultimately unanswerable question of whether his representation of Jim's speech was authentic.

Before tackling the problems that authenticity has made for our modern criticism on "Explanatory" and the methodological and theoretical issues it foregrounds, I spend the first section of this chapter examining some contemporary reviews of *Huck Finn* that respond directly to Twain's claims about the dialect representations in the novel. I do so not because I want to write an exhaustive reception history of the novel, but because these reviews reveal to us a strange inversion of the post-authenticity critical approaches I will advocate in this chapter. The most remarkable thing I show in the first section of this chapter, "Storehouses and Puzzles: Contemporary Reviews of 'Explanatory'," is that by completely accepting the idea that Twain's "Explanatory" is an accurate, unproblematic statement about what readers will find in the text, his contemporary reviewers actually provide a richer tapestry of possible conclusions about the text than modern critics who have approached "Explanatory's" claims to linguistic accuracy as a call for debate. By passing over any questions regarding the truth of "Explanatory's" claims to represent seven dialects in one text, Twain's contemporary reviewers often touch on vexing issues about what dialect representations are good for, if anything; what effects they have on their readers; and how art and ethnography might coexist in a literary text. In contrast, as I will show, our modern criticism on the novel often seeks to answer "yes" or "no" to the question of authenticity within a predetermined set of assumptions about authenticity's literary and social value.

I will then show in the second section, "Literary Linguistics," that these questions have always haunted scholars of literary dialects, even the many mid-to-late-twentieth-century scholars who have tried to brush them aside on their way to solve Twain's puzzle using linguistics. By presuming that better linguistic methods present better analyses of literary dialects but by limiting the conclusions that these analyses can reach to binary assessments of authenticity, a great deal of critical effort has produced extremely modest results and has not, as yet, presented a compelling argument that linguistic analysis enables us greater insight into the novel or into the techniques that constitute its nonstandard orthographies.

In the third section of this chapter, "Literary Sociolinguistics," I will show how belief in a provable linguistic authenticity has vexed many late-twentieth-century critical efforts to bring analysis of literary dialect into conversation with the drawing and redrawing of racial, ethnic, and class-based lines that occurred in the Gilded Age. Again, our critical desires to draw on analyses of authenticity to support our arguments has produced unimpressive or contradictory results, yet the silver lining here is that each critical failure and contradiction provides the opportunity for reflection on what methods and theories might prove more productive.

In the fourth section of this chapter, "New Directions for Literary Sociolinguistics," I offer some examples of how we might read "Explanatory," free from considerations of authenticity by drawing on the most promising implications of some of the same scholarship I have been criticizing. This section advocates that there is much to be gained by adopting linguistic theories and methods when it comes to dialect writing, but it cautions that the conclusions we can support by those methods and the evidence we can produce cannot answer any questions that adhere to binary results; rather, their function must be to reveal open-ended questions about how textual history, cultural

criticism, linguistic analysis, and computational tools can work together to clarify the interdisciplinary concerns that literary dialects crystallize.

STOREHOUSES AND PUZZLES: CONTEMPORARY REVIEWS OF 'EXPLANATORY'

Gavin Jones has argued that "'Explanatory' is not so much a comment on the techniques of *Huck Finn* as a burlesque of the assumptions upon which dialect writing had depended since the early 1870s." While I ask some questions of Jones's implication that this burlesque evacuates the value of looking at the relationship between "Explanatory" and the details of the text it prefaces, a look at the contemporary reviews for *Huck Finn* reveals a blind critical faith in the novel's (and all literature's) ability to represent real speech that was begging to be burlesqued. The literary-critical crowd responsible for reviewing literature for prominent magazines and newspapers seemed rarely to bat an eye at the thought that a novel could contain seven distinct dialects. The contests that emerge in this critical record have little to do with authenticity but emerge instead from conflicting ideas about what a novel containing seven different dialects was good for. In the previous chapter I offered a very narrow experiment in the possibilities for introducing quantitative results into my research of critical responses to nineteenth-century literary texts using the American Periodical Study. In this section, I provide qualitative interpretations of the reviews of *Huck Finn* collected in Louis Budd's *Mark Twain: The Contemporary Reviews* and in the "Reviews of *Huckleberry Finn*" website hosted on etext.virginia.edu that show Twain's contemporary readers wrestling with what value resided in a claim such as "Explanatory," in a novel such as *Huck Finn*, and by an author such as Mark Twain.[38]

[38] My preference was to find a more comprehensive set of Twain reviews using digital databases, but there is, at present, no such thing. My own efforts to catalog reviews to Twain using the APS proved unproductive, as the Boolean search function turned up very little with regard to articles that responded specifically to Twain's claims in "Explanatory."

At the most elemental level, a disagreement emerged among Twain's reviewers about whether there was any value in representing one (or seven) nonstandard dialects in the novel. We can see opposing readings on this point by considering arguments concerned with the Concord Library's decision to ban the book. In a piece from the *New York Herald* on March 18, 1885, the day after the ban was announced, the paper quotes the rationale for the ban which includes the opinion that the novel was "'couched in the language of a rough, ignorant dialect' and that 'all through its pages there is a systematic use of bad grammar and an employment of inelegant expressions.'" In decrying the use of bad grammar as "systematic" the library's board turns what was and still often is considered a strength of dialect writing against Twain. It is not that the library has any questions about whether Twain was "painstaking" in his efforts to record dialect in the novel; instead, the board disapproves of his socially corrosive decision to represent "ignorant" dialects in the first place. That he did so systematically is all the more damning.

Taking a different approach, an article responding to the ban from the *San Francisco Chronicle* March 29th opposes the decision of the Concord library based not an argument of whether the book's dialects' are authentic or not, but on the apparent inability of the library boards' readers to "appreciate" the art of authenticity, carefully managed:

> the more general knowledge one has the better he is fitted to appreciate the book, which is a remarkably careful sketch of life along the Mississippi river forty years ago. If one has lived in the South, he can appreciate the art with which the dialect is managed, exactly as he can in Joel Chandler Harris' "Uncle Remus," or in Craddock's Tennessee mountain tales. If he has not he will be forced to take it on trust.

It's worth noting that for the Concord Library, the dialect itself is ignorant, not that the author is ignorant of the dialect. Intimate knowledge of vulgar things makes their representation no less vulgar. For the *Chronicle*, however, the readers behind the ban are

ignorant—lacking in the "general knowledge" required to discern and appreciate the "real" in dialect representations—and therefore unable to find the art in what they've read. From our critical distance, we can see the arguments surrounding the Concord Library's ban pointing toward a deeper set of questions about which dialects are worthy of representation and who is authorized to write and read them.[39]

Another contemporary justification for dismissing "Explanatory" beyond the vulgarities it triumphs rests in the question of whether it is even worth it to try to solve the puzzle "Explanatory" presents. The *Boston Advertiser* dismisses the value of the claims that Twain's "Explanatory" makes over issues of their readability: "It would be about as easy to read through a jest book, as to keep up one's interest in the monotonous humor and the dialectic variations of 'Huck Finn's' narrative." Again, the reviewer does not doubt that the dialect variations are there; it's just that it would be a waste of time for the reader to try to figure out which are which. I find this line of argument particularly suggestive, given my skepticism about what objective proof that Twain represented all seven dialects authentically would mean for our reading of the novel.[40] That is, as long as proving something about "Explanatory" constitutes an end in and of itself, its value to our critical conversations remains unclear and, as I will show, can render the conclusions of those who try muted or contradictory.

For those readers who did find value in Twain's dialect variation, that value seemed to split on the differences between art and social science. Consideration of artistic

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[39] I revealed the extratextual slipperiness of these questions in my work on Melville and Lowell in the previous two chapters; in my discussion of modern literary-critical and literary-linguistic responses to "Explanatory" below, I show how persistent these questions have proven themselves through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

[40] In the last section of this chapter, I show that David Carkeet's efforts to prove that there are, in fact, demonstrably different techniques at work in the speech of at least 5 different characters, does prove critically productive.

value comes through in the opinion of the *New York World* (2 March 1885)—which suggests:

> The author informs us in an explanatory note that he uses no less than seven dialects, to wit: "The Missouri negro dialect, the extremest form of the backwoods Pike County dialect and four modified varieties of this last." Discriminating which is which in this extraordinary assortment will be found pleasant literary amusement for people who are fond of puzzles."

Rather than suggesting that there is no value in the puzzle Twain offers, this review suggests that the dialects provide a nice diversion for those who find it, in Melville's words, "worth the consideration of those to whom it may prove worth considering." Implicit in this stance is the assumption that, as an amusing puzzle, the authenticity of the various dialect representations does not, in fact, matter. What matters is whether there are seven distinct systems of literary dialect techniques that a reader might distinguish from one another.[41] I argue that modern criticism might do well to think of efforts to unlock issues of linguistic authenticity systematically as rather closer to the pleasant literary amusements articulated by this critic rather than a key component to our efforts to decode how language, race, and literary form intersect in the novel.

Other critics who affirmed the value of Twain's multiple dialect representations pushed their reflections beyond questions of amusement and took up the ethnographic worth of a literary text that, by recording different regional dialects, became a culturally and historically useful artifact. Indeed, the *Athenaeum* suggests that there is a distinction between the artistic and entertainment value of the novel and its ethnographic work by suggesting that readers may learn something by encountering Twain's dialect variations:

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[41] I discuss later in this chapter the work of linguist David Carkeet who approached "Explanatory" as a textual question rather than a question of linguistic authenticity, and proved rather convincingly that, there are nearly as many distinguishable orthographical and grammatical systems at work in the novel as Twain said there were.

> In the course of them we fall in with a number of types of character of singular freshness and novelty, besides being schooled in half a dozen extraordinary dialects—the Pike County dialect in all its forms, the dialect of the Missouri negro, and "the extremest form of the backwoods South-Western dialect," to wit.

For the reviewer of the *SF Chronicle*, those not familiar with southern voices had to take Twain's representations on trust; we see in the *Athenaeum* review that this trust allowed readers to be schooled in a range of literary representations of regionalized and racialized speech; reading these dialects, then, promised an initiation into the company of experienced dialect readers whose "taste" allowed them to discern between literary dialects and adjudicate their values.

The active, educational uses of such work is one possible value for an ethnographic reading; another is a more static, preservationist impulse suggested by the review of the *Hartford Evening Post* (17 Feb 1885):

> The author explains, to correct the possible impression that all the characters were trying to talk alike without succeeding—that he has used a number of dialects, to wit, the Missouri negro dialect; the extremest form of the backwards South-Western dialect; the ordinary "Pike county" dialect; and four modified varieties of the last. "The shadings," he says, "have not been done in a hap-hazard fashion, or by guess work; but painstakingly, and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech."
> As a storehouse therefore of dialect, even more than as a book of humor, the volume is valuable.

Just as for the author of the *Athenaeum* review, for whom the "freshness and novelty" operate alongside the novel's educational uses, the value of the "storehouse" is set against the worth of the amusement afforded by humor. The image of the storehouse put forward in this review suggests a purpose much higher than mere amusement or even than education. A storehouse suggests the need of saving up dialects against a day when American dialects are scarce; perhaps we can read in this metaphor a hint of the threats that Gavin Jones identified in Gilded Age concerns about pervasive "accents of menace" arriving with immigrants and perceptions that upper class speech was becoming

emasculated the more it was isolated from the rugged expressiveness of the American frontiers. It is worth considering the degree to which modern treatments of literary dialect participate in the fantasy of the dialect storehouse. What does it mean, for example, for Gates to want to identify the "richest and fullest" representations of black speech in the late nineteenth century? Or for critics such as Bridgman or authors such as Hemingway to celebrate Huck as the first "real" American voice? What winters have we planned for by inventorying our dialect texts this way?

I close this reading of the contemporary reviews of "Explanatory" by suggesting that we benefit greatly as critics not only by seeking to outline the cultural valences embodied in the goals of the reviewers for asserting what literary dialect texts can be good for (or not good for in the case of the Concord Library). But, we must also be on the lookout for analyses that tell us something about our methods for including reference to a paratext like "Explanatory" in our critical discussions of dialect texts. In reading the reviews of Twain's novel, a suggestive typographical pattern emerges that illustrates the textures possible when we consider what literary dialects and their paratextual material *do* to and for their readers. Many of the reviewers included in Budd's volume simply reproduced "Explanatory" verbatim, and, in doing so, revealed that a claim that an author or a text could represent seven distinct dialects, did not seem strange at all. This may be a testament to the influence that prefaces such as Lowell's and Eggleston's had on readers in convincing them that the author was the best source for assessments of linguistic authenticity. Furthermore, that Twain's readers accepted "Explanatory" at face value indicates the degree to which he had graduated from the ranks of mere humorist to serious regionalist. What is strange, however, is how they marked their verbatim reproductions of "Explanatory" typographically. Consider the following review from the *SF Morning Call*:

> In order that the reader may not suppose that all the diversified characters were trying to talk alike and not succeeding, the author says in an explanatory note that "A number of dialects are used, to wit: The Missouri negro dialect; the extremest form of the backwoods Southwestern dialect; the ordinary Pike County dialect, and four modified varieties of the last." The shadings have not been done in a haphazard fashion, or by guesswork, but painstakingly, and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech.

While this reviewer ascribes the assertions in "Explanatory" to Twain ("the author says"), the way this passage is punctuated obscures where the author's claims end and the reviewers response begins. To this reviewer, the names of the dialects and the divisions between them are quoted as claims from the author, while the reviewer presents claims about their artistic "shadings" and for the author's expertise in his own prose.

When compared to the quotation marks used in the *SF Morning Call* review, however, the previously quoted *Hartford Evening Post* review reveals a completely inverted punctuation strategy. In that review, the dialect classifications are presented directly, while Twain's claims about how and why he recorded them are ascribed to the author in quotation marks. I do not wish to make too much out of too little—the placement of quotation marks could merely represent an editorial decision or typographic carelessness—but I do want to model what it looks like to go slow with literary dialects, their paratexts, and their criticism, given the many pitfalls I will point out when critics move too fast. The observations I've made about the quotation marks here point to a larger question I will explore below; that is, to what degree can other reader's opinions of a literary dialect, even the author's own, provide "evidence" in support of new opinions. What games of confidence do we play when we let a paratext like "Explanatory" set the terms and the boundaries of textual scrutiny?[42]

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[42] I pointed out in Chapter Two that many critics have used Lowell's own words from his Introduction as the best vocabulary to describe what his dialects *are* and what they *do*; the cost of such a maneuver has been the elision of many of the literary and political tensions that were entailed in Lowell's Introduction.

In the next two sections I focus on two modern critical trends: literary-linguistic efforts from the second half of the twentieth century that attempt to "prove" "Explanatory's" veracity in a scientific way and late twentieth century readings that see the "truth" about "Explanatory's" claims regarding accuracy as directly relevant to the racial politics entailed in Twain's treatment of Jim. What these sections reveal is a nearly universal application of a critical logic that equates "authenticity" with positive value in a shifting set of aesthetic, social scientific, and political theaters. Unlike Twain's contemporary reviews which offered competing sets of values for dialect writing enabled by belief in Twain's paratextual claims, much of our modern criticism has taken "Explanatory" as an invitation to pin down answers to the binary question of linguistic authenticity within a predetermined set of literary, linguistic, and social values. After revealing the limitations of such binary readings, I then show the necessity of confronting the political and cultural frameworks modern criticism has constructed that demand "yes/no" answers to questions of linguistic authenticity.

LITERARY LINGUISTICS

Before analyzing specific linguistic responses to Twain's "Explanatory," it is useful to revisit the discussion of Sumner Ives's theory of linguistic authenticity that I sketched in my Introduction. The major point I make in that section is that Ives's theory that literary dialects can be tested for authenticity rest on two major assumptions: (1) The study of literary dialect must be comprehensive and systematic rather than selective and impressionistic; and (2) Analysis must take into account the most recent work by linguists regarding language variation. For Ives this meant avoiding the temptation, indulged by Krapp, to cherry-pick examples to support assessments of authenticity and pinning his analysis to what for Ives was the definitive *Linguistic Atlas of the United*

States. I argue first that efforts to match the phonological features described in the *Atlas* to literary representations already constitutes "cherry-picking" and precludes a truly comprehensive approach to the nonstandard orthographic techniques employed by an author. Furthermore, given sociolinguists' disavowal of "feature lists" as adequate representations of dialect use and variability, any study that follows Ives's theory is not engaging the most current linguistic research. Rather than offering a productive methodology for assessing linguistic accuracy, Ives instead instantiated a rhetoric whereby each new linguistic analysis of dialect texts could find fault with its predecessors by labeling them insufficiently systematic and linguistically uninformed.

Mark Twain's "Explanatory" has proven one of the most tempting testing grounds for Ives's theory and has therefore inspired work that reveals this theory's attendant contradictions. Lee Pederson's article "Mark Twain's Missouri Dialects: Marion County Phonetics" provides a representative example of how Ives's rhetoric of linguistic authority has been employed with regard to "Explanatory." In prefacing his efforts to present a linguistic analysis of Twain's claims, Pederson provides a footnote on the binary readings produced by critics who preceded him in decoding "Explanatory":

> Katherine Buxbaum makes a cursory survey of the dialects in the novel and concludes: 'It is not unlikely that Mark Twain overestimated his powers as a dialect writer.' Miss Buxbaum also notes (p. 236) that 'An annotation in a bibliography of books containing American dialects, published in 1914 by the St. Louis public library, discredits Mark Twain's explanatory note thus summarily: 'This statement is not to be taken seriously; it is merely an example of Mark Twain's humor;' and adds rather drastically, 'He does not stand high as a dialect writer, although some of the dialect in these two works, *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer*, is quite good.' But this seems altogether too sweeping a conclusion.
>
> In Mark Twain's Representation of Negro Speech,' *American Speech*, XVII (1942), 174-76, James Nathan Tidwell discusses Negro speech in the novel, but in terms of only one chapter, and then gives no attention to Missouri dialects.

> Tidwell was convinced, however (p.176) that Mark Twain was both sincere and competent in his representation of the dialect of Nigger Jim.' (261)

By dismissing Buxbaum's efforts as "cursory" and pointing out that Tidwell only focuses on one dialect in one chapter, Pederson leverages Ives's rationale for finding critical work, which I suggest could not succeed anyway, linguistically wanting. Pederson's footnote also reveals the degree to which linguistic analyses of Twain's dialect representation produce a binary set of critical conclusions: Twain was merely joking and did not live up to the task he set for himself or Twain was serious and his dialect representations are sufficiently authentic.

Backed by Ives's "theory," which he says, "defines the relationships between the spelling systems in the written works and the phonology of the living regional and social dialects of the area in which the works are set and in which the authors learned American English" (261-2), Pederson claims that his work on the "pronunciation and incidence of segmental phonemes in Marion County, Missouri, is a necessary step toward understanding the literary dialects of the novel." Pederson, it seems, is content to approach "Explanatory" as a literary–linguistic puzzle worth solving in its own right, given that he never actually reflects on what he has added to our understanding of the novel's dialects. This disinterest can be seen in the fact that Pederson does not mention the novel by name after the first page of his essay's look at the phonemes from Marion County he gathers from "interviews…conducted in Marion County, Missouri, during the months of August and September, 1964." In yet another illustration of the lengths scholars can go to in order to fulfill the fantasy of a stable linguistic reconstruction of a "real" vernacular, Pederson displays a dubious confidence that interviews in a particular region in the second half of the twentieth century constitute a reliable linguistic

touchstone against which to test representations of speech intended to capture a vernacular spoken in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Much as Ives admits the problems with treating an artist like a scientist—a problem that in itself casts serious doubt over the entire enterprise of drawing lines connecting literary orthography and phonology—Pederson also acknowledges the unknowability of what he seeks to know. In a note (which is where many of these kinds of destabilizing acknowledgments find themselves in literary-linguistic studies), Pederson says,

> Dialect spellings, of course, cannot satisfactorily represent supersegmental and para-linguisitic features. In a letter to Joel Chandler Harris on August 10, 1881, Mark Twain describes his presentations of 'The Golden Arm,' and, in doing so, frankly admits his own limitations as a dialect writer, as well as the inadequacy of all literary dialects: 'Of course I *tell* it in the negro dialect—that is necessary; but I have not written it so, for I can't spell it in your matchless way. It is marvelous the way you and Cable spell the negro and creole dialects.[43]

I argue that a truly literary-linguistic approach to the question of how well Twain represented dialects in his novel should push the limitations on an orthography to represent real speech to the forefront rather than hiding them behind dubious efforts to juggle the complications entailed by a theory of objective assessments of authenticity. Instead, Pederson makes a subtle rhetorical move when he claims that dialect spellings cannot represent "suprasegmental and para-linguistic features" and then quotes Twain about his inability to "spell" negro speech well. Twain seems to think that Harris and Cable have managed to spell everything necessary for a full and rich representation of speech. I argue that Twain's unfavorable comparison of his own techniques to Cable's and Harris's offers justification for a systematic, comprehensive comparison of the patterns of

[43] Suprasegmentals include things such as tone, prosody, and vowel length that even our most advanced transcription practices have a hard time recording.

nonstandard orthographies that each author employs. Instead, Pederson relegates this possibility to an aside that undercuts the rationale for his decision to test Twain's nonstandard orthography against the transcriptions that Pederson made in his field interviews.

What, then, can Pederson say about the novel after he has performed his feature-list matching? Indeed, the last sentence of Pederson's essay, where we might expect him to return to reflections on the lines he draws connecting orthography and phonology in order to add to our understanding of the novel, hits a rather uninspired tone: "Finally, three other relic pronunciations remembered only in Negro speech follow" after which he produces comparisons of pronunciation for *always, going*, and *ask*. That Pederson does not attach any of his linguistic analysis to consideration of the novel itself is telling for scholars coming after who have wrestled with the question of what proof of authenticity would mean in the cultural and political context of the novel's publication. I suggest that Pederson's muteness on the topic points to the inadequacy of linguistic authenticity as a mediating logic between linguistic and literary analysis. In this light, we might reconsider Schneider's point that Lisa Minnick's feature-matching tables for Jim's speech and "real" AAVE do not find convincing context in her discussion of the literary-critical issues focused by representations of racialized speech. The indifference that Pederson shows to making his linguistic analysis mean anything for Twain's novel and Minnick's inability to do so raises a question for linguistic work on literary dialects driven by the logic of authenticity analogous to the question Robert Frost's witch of Coos asks about her powers to make a table kick like an army mule: "And when I've done it, what good have I done?"

It may seem unfair to deconstruct the theoretical and methodological flaws in a study from 1967, but I hope to show that the tautologies of demonstrable linguistic authenticity are timeless. As long as we insist that, given the right methods, we can pin

down the mysteries of literary dialect and map them onto an artificial binary of "authentic/inauthentic," we will always play the confidence game Melville dramatizes in the efforts of Black Guinea's interrogators to "prove" his authenticity. This metaphor is particularly apt when we consider how Ives has functioned as an authority in more recent studies. Take, for example, Sylvia Holton's argument about "Explanatory" in *Down Home and Uptown* (1984), which draws on the work done by Curt Rulon, who follows the Ivesian impulse:

> Although from "Explanatory"—and indeed from the text—it is unclear how many dialects Twain has sought to distinguish, whether he claims a minimum of three or a maximum of seven, one critic, Curt Rulon, is of the opinion that there are basically only two, "a mixture of Caucasian (South) Midland and Southern speech on the one hand, and a mixture of Negro (South) Midland and Southern speech on the other hand.' So of Mark Twain's dialects here, certainly at least one of them is a localized Black English.

If Rulon is playing the same feature-matching confidence game that Ives or Pederson plays, how much should his opinion count for Holton? Does it justify Holton's certainty about "localized Black English"? When, in *The Confidence-Man*, the Methodist preacher (a title which takes on a rich pun in this context) finds the man in the gray coat and white tie who vouches for Black Guinea, he must confront the fact that this man, who seems to offer reliable proof of Black Guinea's identity, contradicts himself. He first declares that he helped Black Guinea off the ship at St. Louis and then asks the minister to help him find him. The question is whether finding someone willing to vouch for some unknowable thing makes that thing more knowable.

LITERARY SOCIOLINGUISTICS

The question of whom we can trust in our quests to evaluate the authenticity of literary dialects takes on weight when it is put into the context of literary texts that use orthographic differences to represent social categories of difference such as race. I read

this critical question into Shelley Fisher Fishkin's famous and controversial book *Was Huck Black*? Fishkin weighs in on what we can say about Twain's representations of Jim's speech in the context of the author's racial politics:

> Jim's speech represented Twain's "pains-taking" efforts to accurately record, to the best of his ability, "Missouri Negro Dialect." But unlike virtually all other white writers of African-American dialect before him (and many who came after him), Twain refused to allow the dialect to break the flow of the speaker's words. His use of eye dialect (like 'wuz') is minimal. His primary concern is communicating Jim's very human pain.

I have a number of problems with readings like this, as my readers will surely have anticipated. First of all, Fishkin quotes from "Explanatory" directly with the word "pain-staking" and the phrase "Missouri Negro Dialect." While these may seem small details, they raises an important question about how paratexts function within criticism on the texts they introduce. Do we view them as another critical voice (the author's) or rather as part of the text we are evaluating—or both? By quoting "Explanatory," Fishkin seems to imagine Twain's own words as providing reliable critical grounding for what she will go on to argue about Twain's dialects. This issue resonates with my readings of many of Twain's contemporary reviewers who quote all or part of "Explanatory" in their descriptions of what readers will find in the book.

Second, Fishkin imagines textual details from *Huck Finn*'s orthographic distributions to support her implied claim from above that Twain cared about strict linguistic transcriptions just slightly less than he cared about representing Jim's pain readably. In doing so, Fishkin draws a distinction between orthographic variations that suggest accuracy—though she doesn't quote any here—and those that do not, such as those she calls "eye dialect."[44] We must again question how much confidence we can

[44] For a description of "eye dialect," see Bowdre, though this essay, too, should be put under the microscope for its belief that some nonstandardizations are "real" and others are phonologically empty orthographic distortions meant to denigrate the characters who use them.

have in deciding which orthographic deviations represent "real speech" and which do not. Fishkin's strange qualification "minimal" underscores the value of Barrish's point about how taste informs our responses to dialect writing; it's not that Twain doesn't use "wuz," but his use of it falls within an undetermined level deemed acceptable by cultivated readers such as Fishkin. In point of fact, "wuz" shows up 30 times in the novel, the majority of which are spoken by Jim.[45] Just as Gates's claim that the black speech in *Iola Leroy* is the richest in the period, Fishkin's suggestions that Twain's use of "wuz" was minimal creates, I argue, a critical responsibility to provide some comparative analyses of Twain's intertexts that employ "wuz" more frequently. As long as we decide beforehand that Twain was sympathetic to Jim and that the use "wuz" is stereotypical, we cannot help but find "minimal" uses of "eye dialect." The actual textual facts matter little in these contexts and predetermined impressions often circulate as critical evidence.

Third, we might ask what it means to conclude that Twain represented Jim's speech "to the best of his ability"? To my mind, this hedge is a tacit acceptance of the idea that any effort to record speech accurately in writing necessarily runs into limitations, but Fishkin's insistence that Twain deliberately did not overdo his efforts to record speech accurately in order to achieve "accuracy as well as readability," and that such restraint separates him from other white writers of black speech begins to confuse any logic that rests on Twain's abilities. Fishkin seems to say both that Twain couldn't help it if his written speech wasn't perfect, and that he was completely in charge of his representations of Jim's pain. Which writers are given the slack to do their best and which ones are not?

---

[45] In a quick word find for " wuz " and " wuz." And " wuz," I found that Jim says "wuz" 27 times, a "nigger woman" uses "wuz" once and Mrs. Hotchkiss uses it twice.

In another rhetorical maneuver, reminiscent of Pederson's footnote cataloguing the opposing readings of *Huck Finn*'s linguistic authenticity that predated his own, Fishkin piles up the contradicting opinions of scholars who have addressed the racial politics embedded in Twain's representations of Jim's speech as evidence for another attempt to solve the binary questions demanded by authenticity:

> David Sewall contends that Jim's speech 'is, in fact, romanticized folk speech.' Others have taken positions to the contrary. Sterling Brown wrote that 'Jim is the best examples in nineteenth fiction of the average Negro slave…[He] is completely believable'; Sylvia Holton observed that 'Mark Twain's representations of Jim's dialect is certainly extremely well done.' And writing in *Negro Digest* in 1965, Martin Pedigo maintained that
>
> > Twain's Negroes…spoke out—realistically, of course—to each other and to the Huck Finns who represented the wisdom of youth that [had not] been taught to hate yet.
> >
> > Their simple pleas for the basic comforts and dignity ring out as did Martin Luther King's plea for his 'dream.'
>
> Perhap [sic] some overstatement may be attributed to both sides. The evidence suggests that Twain was striving, to the best of his ability, for accuracy as well as readability.

If we were suspicious of the first time Fishkin uses the phrase "to the best of his ability" we should be alarmed at its second appearance. In a shifting kaleidoscope of evaluative possibilities for literary dialects that allow concessions to readability to explain away linguistic inaccuracies and consistencies, we must once again confront the fact that much of our literary dialect criticism merely shows us the lengths to which we go in order to leverage literary dialect as a *sui generis* textual phenomenon that promises objective conclusions even as it demands the subjective textual manipulations.

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR LITERARY SOCIOLINGUISTICS

There is a danger in being overly critical of a groundbreaking work that was published sixteen years ago, but I take issue with Fishkin's methodological and

theoretical approaches to representations of literary dialect precisely because they so clearly focus the problems even our best literary critics, textual scholars, cultural critics, and literary-linguists face as long as they go on the wild goose chase of linguistic authenticity. In this light, Fishkin's work is essential to the advancement of the field, because it reveals to us the truths we must keep in mind when we confront literary dialect representations about the need to be as precise as our tools allow us to be and forthright about the limitations of those tools. Furthermore, Fishkin's arguments alert us to the necessity of being skeptical about the impressionistic conclusions embedded as facts throughout the critical tradition.

Lisa Minnick's *Dialect and Dichotomy* is the most recent and most ambitious effort to use linguistic innovations in order to move us beyond the problems I have outlined above. In her introduction, Minnick asserts that

> Reactions to dialectal representations without analysis of the specific strategies incorporated into those representations is not far removed from dismissing individuals without knowing anything about them, simply on the basis of their speech characteristics. (xv)

Ives suggests that the better our methods, the more we can know about the "real" speech and the more comprehensive our studies become, the better our analyses of literary dialect are. I advocate removing the vexing ingredient of the "real" speech but I do not reject the ideas that literary dialects need comprehensive and systematic treatment. I have already discussed the great potential for computational tools to generate "data" on literary dialects in my "Introduction." I have also made the case that Minnick's "benchmarking" strategy of lining up orthographic features with phonological features from the "real" speech is ultimately futile, even if it has been aided by computational tools. So, our question is, what can we ask our computers to do? The answer begins to take shape when we consider David Carkeet's approach to the literary dialects in *Huck Finn*, an approach

that Arac has argued constitutes "the most authoritative article on the dialects of *Huckleberry Finn*" (83).

One of the great strengths of Carkeet's "The Dialects in *Huckleberry Finn*" is that it tries as no other approach to dialect writing I've seen to separate questions about what literary dialects *are* from what they *do*. To put this point in the terms I've been using in this chapter, he clears up confusion about his methods and his goals. His methods offer an invaluable insight into how we might proceed with our analysis of "Explanatory" and our treatment of all literary dialects because he focuses on the differences between the dialects within the text. He concludes that "a detailed examination of *Huckleberry Finn* shows that there are differences in the way people speak that are too systematic to be accidental." Carkeet can arrive at this point because he is not interested in testing the relationships between Twain's orthography and real speech, noting that the question of the relationship "between the dialects in the novel and the linguistic reality of the Mississippi Valley in the mid-nineteenth century…has already been dealt with elsewhere and because answering it sheds little light on the meaning of the preface." (316) Once he concludes that there is a case to be made for the seven different dialects at work in the novel he is then free to muse on what this fact means for Twain. After showing that the dialects work textually as "Explanatory" says they do, he reflects on the book's place in its own literary and social contexts:

> In *Huckleberry Finn*, *gwyne*, palatalization, and *r*-lessness are—for both blacks and whites—physical signals of low social status, and –for whites only—physical signals of 'substandard' morals. These white characters may share something of Jim's dialect, but they do not share in his goodness.
>
> Finally, it is important to recognize the showmanship in their ambitious, seven-way dialectal differentiation and in the attention the author calls to it. Clemens composed *Huckleberry Finn* in the heyday of literary dialect in American

> literature, and no doubt he wanted to show what he too was capable of doing, especially with the 'Pike-County' dialect that he helped to create. (332)

Carkeet's hypothesis that Twain was showing off his dialect writing skills in a period that placed immense value on an author's dexterity with nonstandard orthographic techniques does not refute Jones's conclusion that Twain was burlesquing his period's obsessions with dialect writing; rather, it allows for new possibilities for reading Twain as both a participant and an observer of those obsessions. I argue that this double reading of "Explanatory" is far more critically productive than the impasses presented by the opposed readings that Schmidt suggests constitute Twain's greatness.

Carkeet's systematic efforts to solve the puzzle of "Explanatory" within the text, rather than with recourse to an unrecoverable touchstone of "real speech," shows how critics may avoid the problems revealed in Fishkin's attempts to make what Twain's literary dialect techniques *are* synonymous with what they *do*. There is great promise in this approach, especially when we combine it with the promise of Minnick's emphasis on computational tools. I take a small step toward fulfilling this promise in my next chapter, in which I systematically "fingerprint" three plantation fiction texts in order to point out differences within and among the patterns of dialect representations of Charles Chesnutt, Joel Chandler Harris, and Thomas Nelson Page. I use these fingerprints, generated from a process intentionally blind to research on "real" African American speech in the nineteenth century to reshape critical questions about what those fingerprints might say in the over-determined socio-politics of a genre that is founded on degrading representations of former slaves.

CONCLUSIONS

Christian Mair's theory of "literary sociolinguistics" provides a framework for how considerations of literary dialect techniques can be put into conversation with the

socio-political themes crystallized by literary representations of language variation. In it he draws an analogy between literary theories based on Bakhtin's ideas of *heteroglossia* in fiction and the ideas of linguists like M.A.K Halliday who pointed out that urban speech was a "network of criss-crossing currents of talk" (109). For Mair, identifying the currents of talk within texts can help literary scholars make arguments about how effectively a work of art questions the prevailing language attitudes of its time. Mair favors those works that blur the lines between standard narrators and nonstandard characters.[46] In this light, novels such as George Washington Cable's *The Grandissimes*, which daringly interweaves the orthographic techniques he uses to represent of the speech of Louisiana Creole speakers into his representations of the speech of upper-class white characters, are poised for efforts to identify their different voices using computational tools to produce descriptive data. Though Mair focuses on how linguistics can help reveal *heteroglossia* within texts, his "literary sociolinguistics" can also guide criticism into works such as Harris's, Page's and Chesnutt's which are built on clear lines between standard and nonstandard speakers; as I will show in the following chapter, texts which employ the same formal strategies (in the case of plantation fiction, the "frame narrative" in which former slaves relate tales of the old plantation to white interlocutors) can be drawn together in an intertextual network of criss-crossing currents of talk.

[46]Gates's compelling reading in *Signifying Monkey* of the free indirect discourse in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* comes to mind here.

Chapter 4: Literary Forensics: Fingerprinting the Literary Dialects of Three Works of Plantation Fiction

In a scene widely and convincingly read as a courtroom farce with a tragic understanding of late-nineteenth-century racial politics, Mark Twain's title character in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* uses his fingerprint records of the people of Dawson's Landing as forensic evidence that "Tom" is not only Judge Driscoll's murderer, but, more damningly, his salable property. In doing so, Twain represents what Eric Sundquist calls "the perversions of justice and the nearly hallucinatory structures of pseudoscientific theory that coursed throughout nineteenth-century intellectual, political and legal debate about race in the United States" (226).[47] That "Tom" is, in fact, the killer is beside the point; for Sundquist, in a legal system that demands "natural" barriers to be drawn between races where they are neither justified nor feasible, there is no such thing as a correct interpretation of fact. Facts themselves border on hallucinations in this context. In the case of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, the correct identification of the killer is not a Sherlock Holmesian case of the truth shining through after rigorous and disinterested examination of evidence, but rather a cautionary tale about how the kinds of questions we ask and the contexts in which our answers are presented can render interpretation of any evidence dubious at best and dangerous at worst.

I begin this chapter with *Pudd'nhead Wilson* because it provides a number of useful parallels for my work on literary dialects, which uses computational tools to "fingerprint" representations of nonstandard dialects in works of plantation fiction from the late nineteenth century. Michele Birnbaum has pointed out the logical fallacies behind

[47] For further discussion of this courtroom farce, see Rogin (1990) and Gillman (1990).

late-nineteenth-century dialect authors' obsessions with the authenticity of their dialect representations and the "objective" divisions they entrenched between standard (white) and nonstandard (black) speakers. And Gavin Jones has convincingly identified the deep-seated ambivalence about language variation's potential for vibrant expressiveness on the one hand, and for cultural corrosiveness on the other that informed these obsessions. My research, however, is more concerned with the questionable social-scientific structures that have coursed through some critical attempts to counteract the dangers of racist pseudoscience. Certainly Wilson's systematic methodology for fingerprinting helps to correct the town's xenophobic forensics behind Luigi's arrest for murder, yet they do so at the expense of propping up a racist parody of justice for "Tom," whose identity and guilt, once exposed, do not provide him his own impartial trial but a one-way ticket down the river.

Representations of language variation in literature matter immensely to literary criticism and its relevance to social justice, particularly given sociolinguist Alexandra Jaffe's insight that "orthography selects, displays and naturalizes linguistic difference which in turn is used to legitimize and naturalize cultural and political boundaries" (502-3). But the immensity of that importance has bedeviled our ability to think first and clearly about what we can know about literary dialects, how we can know it, and what conclusions we can reach with that knowledge. This chapter offers an alternative to objectively stated and dubiously supported pronouncements on the authenticity of literary dialects by using computational tools to perform "surface readings" of three plantation fiction texts that eschew authenticity as a feasible or even desirable goal of inquiry.[48] Literary dialects are literary phenomena interesting enough in their own right to sustain

[48] See my "Introduction" for the example of Gates's and Carby's opposing readings of Harper's *Iola Leroy*.

serious critical inquiry apart from the desire to match orthography to phonology under a critical regime that demands binary verdicts of guilt by way of racist stereotype or innocence by way of genuine representation or subversive resistance. I argue that the very urge to celebrate or condemn authors on the basis of linguistic accuracy is hindering our ability to borrow responsibly from linguistic and computational tools; such tools would help us describe those representations first, before considering them in their sociopolitical contexts.

Because celebrations and condemnations of plantation fiction writers are so inextricably bound to criticism on this genre, the writings of Charles Chesnutt, born of freed slaves, Joel Chandler Harris, whose work formed the basis for Disney's notorious *Song of the South*, and Thomas Nelson Page, a former plantation owner, provide perfect loci to situate surface readings to see whether we can, in fact, demonstrate quantitative differences among these literary dialects that map onto the differences in racial politics that we feel so strongly underlie these texts. Rather than presenting my analyses as antagonistic to cultural histories of race, language, law, and culture, I hope that they will augment such inquiries with more precise evidence, grounded in relevant linguistic theories and aided by computational tools.

LITERARY DIALECT AND LEVELS OF INTERPRETATION

In order to suggest how such a critical balancing act might be performed, I return to *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and advocate a subtler reading of Wilson's fingerprint project. To defend Wilson's fingerprinting project is an unconventional critical maneuver, given Sundquist's incisive reading of the injustice that Wilson's fingerprint forensics constitutes, or Simon Cole's argument that "in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, fingerprints are not mere individualizers, but determinants of racial legal categories as well" (237). At best, critics

see Wilson's efforts as part of a larger social critique by Twain, who "understood that the real synergy between fingerprints and race lay precisely in [science's] ability to construct legal and biological fictions" (Cole 238). Wilson's courtroom performance seems to thematize for Twain that while a pseudoscientific hobby may reveal the truth of "Tom's" identity, it cannot ensure justice. My defense of Wilson's methods, however, rests on what happens *before* Wilson uses his fingerprints to prop up the legal and biological fictions of his day. While researching this chapter, I was struck by an unexpected, uncanny set of similarities between what Twain tells us about the motivations and methods behind Wilson's fingerprinting efforts, and how digital humanist Stephen Ramsay describes his own methods and motivations behind "StageGraph," a program he designed to "fingerprint" Shakespearean plays based on scene changes and locations. This happy accident has helped guide my own methodology for fingerprinting plantation texts, and underscored the importance of separating a methodology that produces data, such as Wilson's fingerprint archive or Ramsay's graphs of Shakespearean plays, from a set of predetermined conclusions that, by demanding "objective" support, taint that support's objectivity.

Twain tells us that Wilson's interest in making glass slides of townspeople's fingerprints and cataloguing each "record" by name and date was a "pet fad" to which "he gave no name, neither would he explain to anybody what its purpose was, but merely said it was an amusement" (28). This lack of practical purpose for his work does not dampen his enthusiasm for his data, as "he often studied his records, examining and poring over them with absorbing interest until far into the night" (29). We can hear the echoes of Wilson's interest in fingerprints for their own sake in Ramsay's "utter absence of a research question or hypothesis" (180) behind his efforts to graph scene changes in Shakespeare's plays. Like Wilson, Ramsay tells us that he "spent many hours pouring

[sic] over directed graphs of Shakespeare's plays, and [he found] the activity utterly absorbing" (182). Both projects begin with a researcher developing a methodology for an interest that has no stated or obviously conventional purpose; neither makes claims to be doing science, yet they both see the value of a methodology that produces results that are worth "poring over" for their own sake, not for the sake of answering definitively one particular interpretive question, especially one as charged as proving a binary distinction between "white" and "black."[49] Rather, Wilson seems initially interested in the open-ended question, "What are fingerprints like?" Ramsay seems motivated by the question, "What are Shakespeare's scenes like?" In my work on representations of speech in plantation fiction, I follow their lead and ask, "What are literary dialects like?" in order to produce readings of my own data worth poring over for their own sake, and to avoid thinking of literary dialects merely in terms of how closely they approximate an unrecoverable "real" speech in favor of comparing different authors' nonstandard orthographies to one another and to standard written English.

METHODOLOGY AND HYPOTHESES

My approach has been to develop a methodology that will provide a quantitative description of what occurs within and between particular literary dialects. I selected four "plantation fiction" editions from the last two decades of the nineteenth century, a period which Jones describes as "crazy about dialect" (1), in which a standard English narrator frames stories told in quoted speech by a former slave: *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings* (1881) by Joel Chandler Harris, *In Ole Virginia* (1895) by Thomas Nelson Page, *The Conjure Woman* (1899) by Charles W. Chesnutt, and *Devil Tales* (1900) by Virginia

[49] Simon Cole draws a distinction between Sir Francis Galton's efforts to use fingerprint patterns to essentialize race and Twain's skepticism about the process. Michael Rogin suggests, however, that "fingerprints defeat Galton because they cannot establish racial and characterological difference; they defeat Mark Twain because they can" (80).

Frazer Boyle. These texts form a comparable group of book-length collections of short stories that allow statistically significant analyses within and between texts. Once I had selected these texts, I sought digital versions that could be marked with XML tags (compatible with the Text Encoding Initiative's [TEI's] standards for encoding literary texts) to allow the aggregation of data that describe each text's large-scale orthographic patterns. The University of North Carolina's *Documenting the American South* site provided XML/TEI texts for Page, Harris, and Chesnutt that made these markings possible; for Boyle, however, the only available digitized version came from Google Books, which did not render a plain text document isomorphic with TEI in a way consistent with the other three, so I reluctantly dropped Boyle from consideration.[50] In pursuit of answers to my question, "What are literary dialects like?" I marked these texts so that three levels of discourse could be considered: the entire text, all quoted speech within the entire text, and all quoted speech from dialect characters within all quoted speech. While the goal of macro-scale descriptions at each of these levels should add to our discussions of these authors and provide a methodology applicable to any other dialect text, I anticipated that the generalizations made possible by these descriptions would seed more specific questions requiring greater granularity, so I marked each example of quoted speech with sociolinguistic variables for each character's race, age, gender, region, and class.[51] All of the steps I have described thus far are preparatory: gathering texts, ensuring their viability for study, identifying the portions of the text I want to isolate, and marking those portions with multiple variables. In the spirit of Franco

[50] While the analysis of my data below makes some use of these variables, I operated under the assumption that the more ways I encoded to slice up the texts, the better, both for my work on plantation writers and for studies that might follow my methodology.

[51] Because this information was not always explicit, I ended up approximating ages as children, adult, and elderly. The clearest sociolinguistic variable throughout was race, but Harris's text is full of speaking animals that don't fit into such categories

Moretti's exhortation that "problems without a solution are exactly what we need in a field like ours, where we are used to asking only those questions for which we have an answer" (26), I allowed myself to pause after preparation and make some hypotheses for my research questions before my data was generated. Hypothesizing is a failsafe against being overwhelmed with data gathering for no purpose; in making and testing my hypotheses, I remained committed to the possibility that my results could just as likely prove inconclusive or refute my hypotheses as prove them valid. First, taking issue with Carby's idea that an author could place an "invented" language in the mouths of characters, I hypothesized that literary dialects are not, in a broad sense, drastically different from standard written English. Second, I hypothesized that the percentage of these texts "spoken" by dialect characters would be over 50%, given the conventional frame narrative of plantation fiction in which a standard speaking first-person narrator or third-person narrator turns the text over to a nonstandard speaker early in each tale and provides a coda at the end. Third, I hypothesized that, despite the differences in racial politics between the three authors, the ratios of nonstandard items in the entire texts, in all quoted speech, and in quoted speech from dialect characters would be roughly the same.

To test these hypotheses using data from the texts, I needed an efficient way of gathering textual data. With the help of my colleague at the University of Texas at Austin, Travis Brown, I ran computer scripts on my marked-up digital texts. Scripts are computer programming languages that enable their users to pull relevant or meaningful information out of other computer applications, such as digital texts marked in TEI. To test the hypotheses that I set out above, we designed our script to (1) count the types and tokens of all lexical items in each text; (2) count the "nonstandard" types and tokens in each text; and (3) distinguish these counts within each of my intratextual divisions: (a) entire text, (b) quoted speech, and (c) quoted speech from dialect characters.

RESULTS

The following tables present the counts of type and token data for lexical items for the entire texts ("total"), all quoted speech ("quoted") and all quoted speech from dialect characters ("marked"). Out of the total type and token counts, I have further broken down data on the nonstandard ("NS") types and tokens of lexical items.[52] There is no empirical measurement for how many types or tokens might be meaningful, but as my hypotheses set out, I am interested in learning: (1) whether literary dialects are drastically different from standard written English; (2) whether the percentage of literary dialect in these texts is high (over 50%); and (3) whether among these three texts, the ratios of nonstandard items in the entire texts, in all quoted speech, and in quoted speech from dialect characters are roughly the same. Thus, the key data point is not some certain number but, rather, the ratios of nonstandard types and tokens to overall types and tokens. These ratios appear in the right two columns for each author.[53] The use of ratios is meant to suggest that there are no units of measurement for the kind of analysis I'm suggesting here, nor is my work meant to produce inferential statistics that can be extrapolated to all literary dialects. Rather, these ratios allow us to come up with descriptive data that will help identify similarities and differences within individual texts and among groups of texts.

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[52] In this case, we defined "nonstandard" as lexical items that were not recognized by the computer's pre-programmed word list; we checked the validity of this approach by checking the 100 lexical items identified as "nonstandard" to insure that there weren't any errors that distorted the data.

[53] To check the efficacy of using lack of recognition by an English word list as the touchstone for "nonstandard" items, I generated a list of the 500 most common nonstandard items, to make sure there were no bogus items skewing the data. The results were encouraging, with the expected items de, en, an', and ter occupying the top spots.

Table III: Chesnutt counts:

	Types	Tokens	Nonstandard Types	Nonstandard Tokens	Ratio Nonstandard: All Types (%)	Ratio Nonstandard: All Tokens (%)
Total:	4,292	37,450	1,444	14,305	33.64	38.20
Quoted:	2,970	30,099	1,410	14,070	47.47	46.75
Marked:	2,624	28,111	1,402	13,978	53.48	49.72

Table IV: Harris counts:

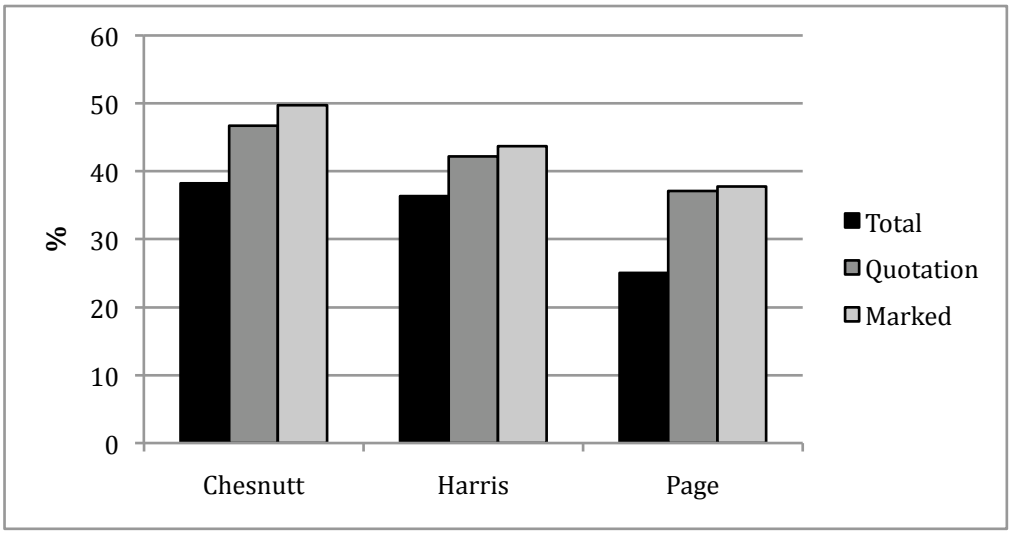
	Types	Tokens	Nonstandard Types	Nonstandard Tokens	Ratio Nonstandard: All Types (%)	Ratio Nonstandard: All Tokens (%)
Total:	5,189	50,452	2,041	18,337	39.33	36.34
Quoted:	3,673	39,817	1,824	16,779	49.66	42.14
Marked:	3,483	38,008	1,813	16,594	52.05	43.66

Table V: Page counts:

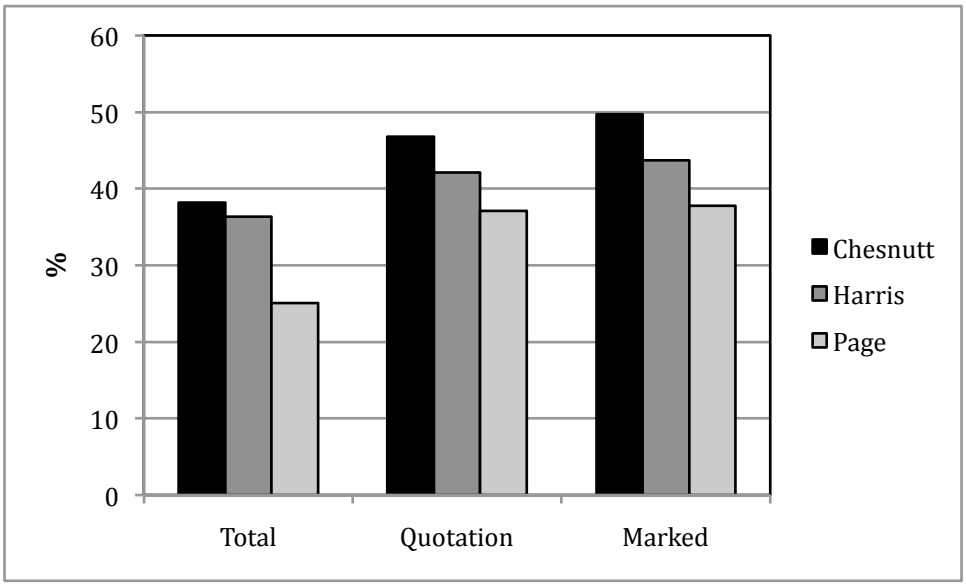
	Types	Tokens	Nonstandard Types	Nonstandard Tokens	Ratio Nonstandard: All Types (%)	Ratio Nonstandard: All Tokens (%)
Total:	6,025	61,589	1,598	15,431	26.52	25.05
Quoted:	3,439	39,908	1,496	14,806	43.50	37.10
Marked:	3,329	38,924	1,474	14,714	44.28	37.80

These ratios are visualized in Graphs III and IV below.

Graph III: Nonstandard Tokens by Author



Graph IV: Nonstandard Tokens by Context



These graphs allow us to generalize that Chesnutt in all contexts uses relatively more nonstandard tokens than Harris and Page, and that each author's percentage of

nonstandardized items increases from "total" to "quoted" and again from "quoted" to "marked." It would be, in Ramsay's words, "a ham-fisted abuse of statistics and a grotesque parody of scientific method simultaneously" (188) to conclude that the racial politics of each author directly correlate to these percentages of nonstandard tokens. These results do not offer any earth-shattering revelations, and that is part of the point, as my analysis has been based on a wariness about earth-shattering revelations like Wilson's exposure of Luigi's innocence, "Tom's" guilt, and Roxy's subterfuge all in one dramatic swoop. But they do enable some manipulations and analyses that enrich and challenge my hypotheses and, most importantly, allow us to ask more questions to which we don't already know the answers. I have broken down further analysis based on the following questions:

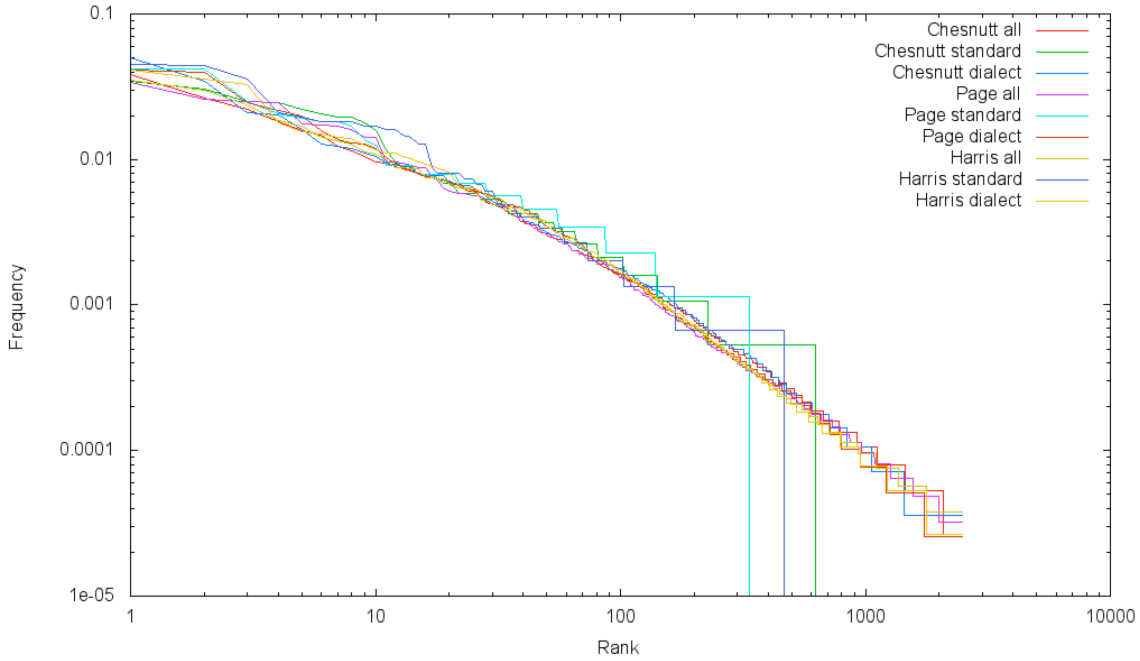
- How different are the literary dialects in question from standard written English?
- How much literary dialect appears in the dialect texts in question?
- How different are the literary dialects in question from one another?

How different are the literary dialects in question from standard written English?

Another way to phrase this question might be, "Is it possible for an author to 'invent' a language for nonstandard characters?" One way to answer this question is to use a broad measure of the distribution of a language's constitutive elements to compare written English and the literary dialects put in the mouths of dialect speakers. One such measure was developed by George Kingsley Zipf, who "devised a comprehensive model of language mainly on the empirical basis of frequency counts in discourse" (Pustet 1). While Zipf's theories are more far reaching than my narrow application of them here suggests, Zipf identified a correlation between a lexical item's rank in terms of frequency

of use and its actual frequency.[54] Graph III shows that there is a high degree of correspondence between frequency ranks (X-axis) and frequency percentages (Y-axis) of each component of each author's language.

Graph V: Zipfian Distribution of Word Frequencies in all Contexts



The important thing to notice in Zipfian distributions is that up to rank 100 or so, the graph is roughly linear, with a discernible jag around rank 20. While the right side of the graph seems to suggest that the "standard" subsets are (suggestively) behaving irregularly, everything on the right side of 100 is confounded by the small size of the sample, and therefore cannot be interpreted.[55] That there is no real difference between the

[54] Zipf made graphs of, among other things, the relationship between city size and city-size rankings within countries and between economic power and social status; see Pustet.

[55] The three "standard" subsets that fall off sharply do so because they have smaller vocabularies than the others. If a selection only contains 800 word types, there won't be any counts for the 801st most frequent word, because there isn't an 801st most frequent word. This graph on its own does not indicate whether the smaller vocabularies of those three subsets actually means anything, since it does not tell us how big (by

dialect writing and the standard English of each text up to rank 100 and that each line follows Zipfian distributions for other English corpora ranks and frequencies suggests that these literary dialects do not come from the moon, even if they may come from the pens of avowed racists like Page.[56] While this graph does not prove my hypothesis correct, it does call into question the idea that literary dialect authors are "inventing" languages to put in their characters' mouths. Thus, we might consider the possibility that the "techniques" that make literary dialects identifiable are comparatively superficial, relying on minor orthographic, lexical, and grammatical variation rather than on violent deviations from the kinds of fundamental statistical distributions Zipf revealed for the English language. Far from settling this question, this generalization demands that we seek out other methods by which we can hold corpora containing deliberate deviations from standard English up to patterns that occur in large samples of standard written English corpora.

How much literary dialect appears in the dialect texts in question?

While "dialect text" is a nebulous categorization that has, for some scholars, embraced the likes of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Dickens, little has been done to see just how much "dialect" makes for a dialect text.[57] It stands to reason, then, that computational tools can help us begin to distinguish among different manifestations of literary dialect texts based on how much literary dialect actually appears in them. The case of plantation fiction makes initial forays into this question rather straightforward, as this genre, perhaps more than any other in the literary dialect family,[58] relies on a frame

token count, not type count) each selection is. If those three selections are much smaller than the others, we would expect them to contain fewer types.

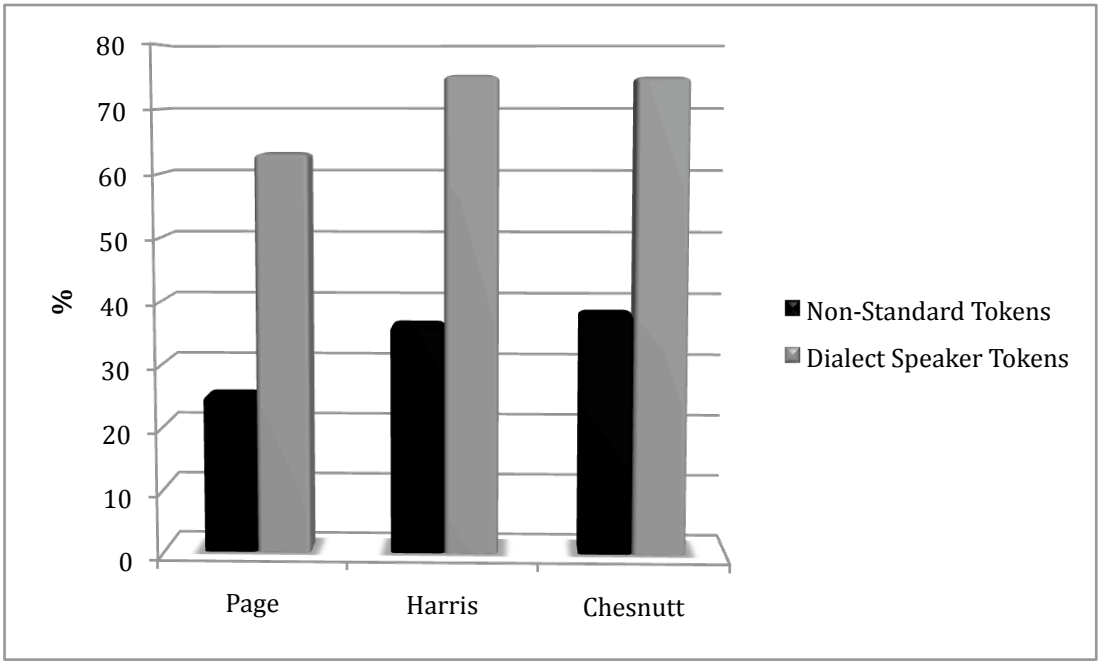
[56] See Victor Grishchenko's "Plot of word frequency."

[57] See Page, *Speech in the English Novel*.

[58] Here again is a bit of conventional wisdom that could be tested by subjecting a broader range of dialect texts to quantitative analysis.

narrative in which the majority of the text is turned over to a dialect speaker by a standard speaking narrator. There seem to be two major considerations when trying to determine how much dialect makes up a dialect text. The first is how much of the text is turned over to quotations by dialect-speaking characters. The second is how much of the entire text is made up of nonstandard lexical items. Graph VI below shows the ratios for each author of nonstandard tokens to total tokens in the entire text, next to the ratio of tokens from direct quotations from dialect speakers to total tokens.

Graph VI: Nonstandard & Dialect Speaker Tokens, by Author



This graph suggests a few generalizations about these plantation texts. First, the majority of each text is spoken by dialect characters, with each text putting at least 60% of the story in dialect. As for the percentage of nonstandard tokens, they do not exceed 40% in any of the texts. As with the broader distributions graphed above, Chesnutt's text exhibits the highest frequencies of both phenomena. At this point we should begin to ask what, for

example, "dialect texts" such as Sarah Orne Jewett's Country of the Pointed Firs, or Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God, would look like on such a graph. These questions help to point out the great potential for collaboration in these efforts; as long as the methodology is consistent, and the results are presented in ratios with sufficient type and token data, the more texts we consider in these ways, the more we may be able to test the conventional wisdom about how we draw lines between dialect texts or how we group them together.

Just as plantation fiction may be grouped by its dependence on third-person, nonstandard speakers narrating within the frame, we might question the inclusion of Thomas Dixon's novel The Clansman in the category of "plantation fiction," if literary dialect rather than attitude is the constitutive element. We might also begin to ask questions about texts that rely on first-person nonstandard narrators, such as Huckleberry Finn, in which the ratio of nonstandardized tokens to total tokens would be much higher.[59] Do subgenres of literary dialect texts exist based on narrative strategies? Do distributions of nonstandard tokens and nonstandard speech help us to define or redefine those subgenres? This line of thinking might also help us to broach a question that has often been swept under the carpet in studies of literary dialect: What is the relationship between dialect prose and dialect poetry?

How different are literary dialect texts from one another?

As I have mentioned above, scholars have often been quick to adjudicate literary dialects in comparative terms. Fishkin praises Delany at the expense of Southwestern

[59] David Carkeet has taken a step in this direction, trying to distinguish the different dialects within the text by using Huck's language as a touchstone. This is one of the few approaches within literary studies that insists writing must be compared to writing rather than to speech.

humor writers.[60] Yet by what measures might we distinguish between two texts' orthographic departures? If we return to Graphs III and IV, we see that Charles Chesnutt uses the highest percentage of nonstandard items in the speech of his dialect characters, nearly 50%. Harris uses 43% and Page uses 37%. We might explain this by hypothesizing that Page is more likely to slip into standard speech in the mouths of his dialect speakers. This hypothesis is supported by a side test I performed concerning "nested" quotations, in which I wanted to determine if there are any demonstrable differences that emerge when black speakers quote white speakers.[61] While there were not enough items in this collection to produce sturdy quantitative results, the lists of all instances of this kind of nested speech reveal that Page is the only one of the three authors to include sentences entirely in standard English, such as in "Meh Lady: A Story of the War," when Captain Wilton is quoted by the slave Uncle Billy as saying, "'I think I may claim to be a kinsman at least of my young Southern cousin here.'" One might be tempted by what we know about Page's racial politics to conclude that there are times when he does not trust his black speakers to speak important lines. Or, is it possible that we can credit Page with trying to capture a complex linguistic situation in which a speaker with one set of dialect features finds himself imitating the dialect features of another? Rather than offering a case requiring knee-jerk adjudication, this passage reveals the critical possibilities open to scholars who target nested quotations and instances of characters slipping out of the literary dialects we've come to expect of them.

---

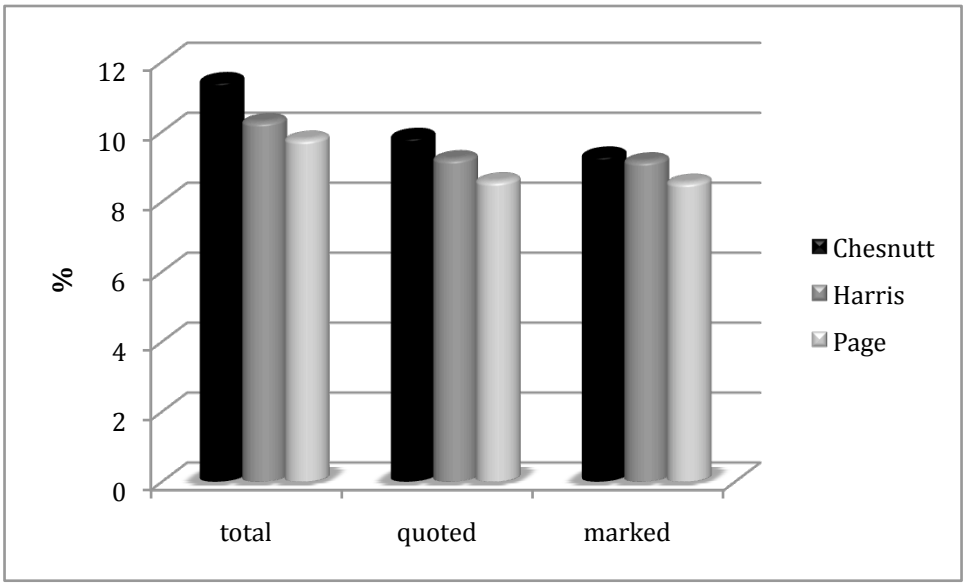
[60] Likewise, Carby's arguments about Harper's folk speech depend upon a comparison to William Wells Brown: "Like Brown, she signaled the presence of the folk through the use of dialect. Though lacking verisimilitude, Harper's construction of folk dialect was a marginal improvement over Brown's rendering of such sentences as "dat's a werry unsensible remark ob yourn. …I admires your judgment werry much, I 'sures you. Dar's plenty ob susceptible an' well-dressed house-serbants dat a gal ob her looks can git widout takin' up wid dem common darkies" (81). As with Fishkin, the evidence for "improvements" is left to speak for itself.

[61] This test shows the value of marking sociolinguistic variables such as race for each speaker.

A second explanation of this discrepancy might be hidden in an issue that my research has, to this point, ignored. While orthographic deviations certainly represent the most obvious examples of deviation from a standard written English, grammatical deviations are also major components of recognizing a literary dialect as "nonstandard." The numbers I've generated might say something about Page's decisions to use relatively fewer deviations from standard orthography than Harris or Page, yet his literary dialects may feel just as nonstandard because of grammatical decisions that my methods cannot quantify.

Graph VII below represents another set of analyses, borrowed from the linguistics toolkit, that can help differentiate between authors' literary dialects. Type-to-token ratios (TTR) are widely regarded as indicators of variation within a speaker's lexicon and vocabulary size. The larger the ratio of types to tokens, the less repetition and the more variation in lexical items. If we analogize this assumption to literary texts, we might see TTR as an indicator of the "richness" of dialect representations that Gates saw in Harper's folk speech.

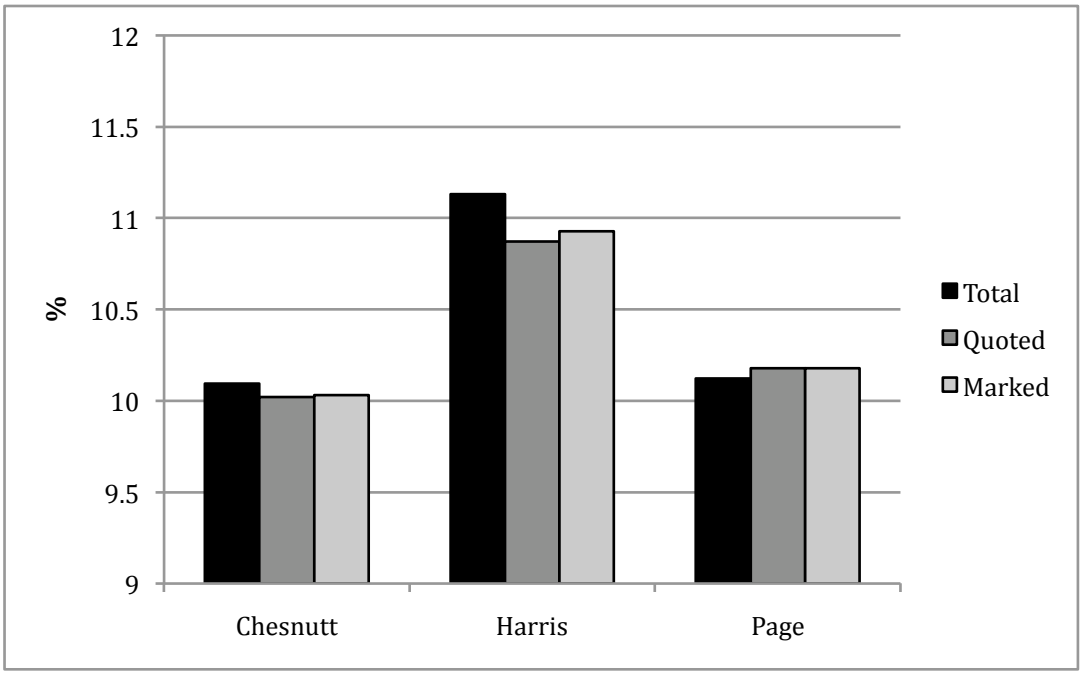
Graph VII: Type/Token, by Context



Does the fact that Chesnutt's ratios of type/token are comparatively higher than those of his contemporaries suggest that his literary dialect is richer than Page's or Harris's? It would be dishonest to suggest a direct correlation between higher type/token ratios and sympathy for dialect speakers on the part of the author, but these ratios do suggest that we might be able to seek quantitative support for the prevailing impression that Chesnutt is better at dialect than his contemporaries. The more texts we treat more broadly, the more granularity we can achieve and the more reliable contexts we can create for our conclusions. At this point, we are one minstrel-show text with a 25% TTR away from going back to square one.

TTR allows another kind of data manipulation that opens new avenues for research. Graph VIII shows TTRs for only nonstandardized types to tokens.

Graph VIII: Nonstandard – Type/Token, by Author



While Graph VII shows that Chesnutt, in all contexts, has higher TTR for all tokens, when TTRs are run for only nonstandardized types and tokens, Chesnutt's ratios are actually lower than Page's and significantly lower than Harris's. So, we might conclude that Harris in fact has the greatest variability when using nonstandardized tokens. While Chesnutt's narrators and dialect characters may have "richer" vocabularies overall, it is Harris who has the greatest variability in his decisions to nonstandardize lexical items. We might attribute this to the strangeness produced in Uncle Remus as a result of its many speaking animal characters. Or, we might see this index as providing hints into how consistent literary dialect writers are. If Chesnutt has fixed forms for each of his nonstandard items, there is a lower chance that he would spell the same nonstandardized word more than one way. Again, these hypotheses demand more analysis and a broader context before they can mean anything on their own, let alone in their sociopolitical contexts.

Literary Form as a Guide for Analyzing Comparative Data

I implied above that my reason for grouping these texts together was based their sharing a framed narrative structure, which was a productive operating assumption. But as I pored over the data and tried to explain why Page's text was so different from Chesnutt's and even Harris's, I realized that these texts were not as uniform as I had assumed. In fact, half of the six tales that Page included in In Ole Virginia did not follow the frame structure at all; they were more conventional narratives in which dialect speakers appeared, but did not dictate the majority of the action. After this realization, I removed these three stories ("Ole 'Stracted," "No Haid Pawn," and "Polly") and ran the script again. The resulting data appears in the table below, compared with the earlier data on Page:

Table VI: Page counts (total):

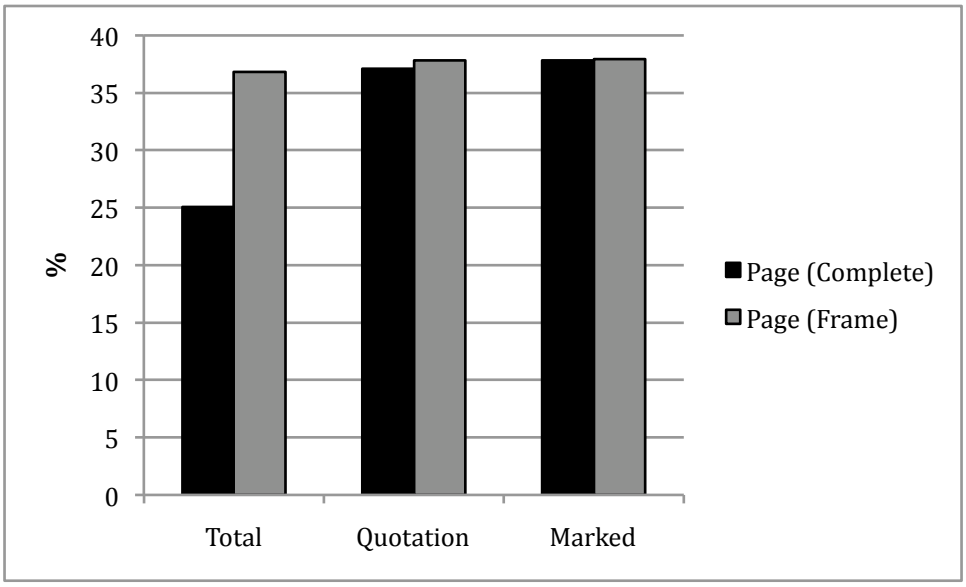
	Types	Tokens	Nonstandard Types	Nonstandard Tokens	Ratio Nonstandard: All Types (%)	Ratio Nonstandard: All Tokens (%)
Total:	6,025	61,589	1,598	15,431	26.52	25.05
Quoted:	3,439	39,908	1,496	14,806	43.50	37.10
Marked:	3,329	38,924	1,474	14,714	44.28	37.80

Table VII: Page counts (frame):

	Types	Tokens	Nonstandard Types	Nonstandard Tokens	Ratio Nonstandard: All Types (%)	Ratio Nonstandard: All Tokens (%)
Total:	3,575	39,233	1,462	14,442	40.90	36.81
Quoted:	3,251	37,070	1,428	14,027	43.92	37.84
Marked:	3,235	36,870	1,423	13,981	43.99	37.92

This comparison shows how much form influences nonstandardization, and how much methodological assumptions affect data. The differences in Page's total data and his "frame" data appear in Graph IX below.

Graph IX: Nonstandard Tokens *(Page)*



As we would expect, the non-frame stories significantly decreased the nonstandardized token percentages, but had little effect on the other contexts. That Page's text includes different kinds of literary dialects and those different kinds of narratives underscores earlier questions about just how much literary dialect it takes to make a literary dialect story.[62] For example, Page's story "No Haid Pawn" actually has no speaking dialect characters at all; rather, the third person narrator merely includes phrases drawn from the nonstandard dialects in the region he describes.[63] We might conclude that Chesnutt's adherence to the frame narrative throughout The Conjure Woman suggests that his uses of nonstandardized tokens was directly influenced by a desire to replicate and interrogate

[62] This realization also calls for a reexamination of the different forms used by Harris in Uncle Remus. Poems and sayings are mixed in with the framed stories, which, in fact do not always make the division between standard narrator and nonstandard story teller as clear cut as Chesnutt does and Page does in "Marse Chan," "Unc Edinburgh," and "Meh Lady: A Story of the War."

[63] Muriel Saville-Troike has argued that "very small differences in an absolute sense may carry a heavy load of social information, while major absolute differences may be socially meaningless" (60). Future research may be able to identify which aspects of nonstandard English carry more weight in our generic assumptions about literary dialects.

one particular kind of plantation story: the frame narrative. For Chesnutt, this frame, used by Page in some—his most famous—but not all of his plantation fiction gave Chesnutt the artistic license to juxtapose John's (often self-satisfied) polysyllabic narration and Julius's alternate storytelling style. We can see how allowing our analysis to draw different cross-sections of data helps us to articulate more precisely issues that have interested literary scholars for ages; questions of genre, of artistic influence, and of authorial agenda, I argue, are revealed and enriched by this data.

CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK

My biggest fear in advocating such a quantitative approach to literary dialects is that it will be construed that only those interested in the "slow pace" of surface reading have the authority to speak about literary dialects. I have already discussed the work of Michele Birnbaum and Gavin Jones, who use the cultural currents of the nineteenth century—the advent of scientism for Birnbaum and the anxieties of a rapidly changing American linguistic and cultural landscape for Jones—to advance valuable arguments about how attitudes toward language variation provide important insights into literary periods. These critical approaches are not threatened by a computational approach that disavows authenticity as a viable or productive target.

Literary critics' desire to redress much of the pseudoscientific violence performed on speaking others by weighing in on representations of literary dialects that can either "limit or liberate" the characters that use them is understandable (Minnick xvi).[64] The methods employed to make these redresses, however, have produced results as disappointing as Wilson's redress of the injustice visited on Luigi by visiting even greater injustice on "Tom." Pudd'nhead Wilson, is, after all, a dialect text in its own right, and

[64] Minnick borrows the question, "Does literary dialect limit or liberate" from Rickford and Rickford (38).

Twain's putting the schemes of the smartest character in the novel, Roxy, in a literary dialect shows how deceptive our gut reactions to literary dialects can be. Just as Wilson cannot crack the case as long as he pegs Roxy as a superstitious darky who is spooked by the "witchcraft" of his fingerprinting archive, we limit our ability to move beyond unproductive and unsupported binaries of guilt and innocence in literary dialects to a host of more suggestive questions about how the inner workings of all literary dialects (not just the ones we like) help to cast light on how we've delineated genres, defined authors, and discussed language variation as a key to exposing sociopolitical and cultural currents in other periods and our own.

That the data presented above is partial and inconclusive as evidence of sociolinguistic phenomena in these texts or as forensic evidence of guilt or innocence on the part of the plantation authors discussed is, I argue, its greatest strength as literary-critical evidence. First, the limitations of my quantitative analysis call us to further refine its methods and further expand the scope of its application. Second, its inability to adjudicate once and for all the questions of sympathy and antipathy toward speaking others that have always accompanied discussions of literary dialect helps us to refocus the goals of our literary-critical inquiries into literary dialects. Unlike the Dawson's Landing court, so eager for justice that injustice will do, literary critics are free to revel in the possibilities afforded by rigorous aversion to settling questions once and for all. Quantitative approaches that adapt models from social sciences and incorporate computational tools help us to identify and reflect upon those literary phenomena that are most resistant to binary conclusions and therefore most suited to our myriad and interconnecting interpretative traditions.

Conclusion: Wordy Ge'mmen

Early in my academic career, I noticed something that struck me as odd while reading Sarah Orne Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs*, a novel that had always resonated with me as a native Mainer who returned home only during my summer breaks. There were, to my mind, an inordinate amount of sentences employing the simile construction "as if." They turned up everywhere, as in the narrator's rendering of Captain Littlepage's parting: "'Step in some afternoon,' he said, as affectionately as if I were a fellow-shipmaster wrecked on the lee shore of age like himself." Or in her description of waking to hear Mrs. Todd's movements outside her window:

> By the unusual loudness of her remarks to a passer-by, and the notes of a familiar hymn which she sang as she worked among the herbs, and which came as if directed purposely to the sleepy ears of my consciousness, I knew that she wished I would wake up and come and speak to her.

Or in her description of her sensations while shaking Mrs. Blackett's hand: "You felt as if Mrs. Blackett were an old and dear friend before you let go her cordial hand." As a scholar trained in linguistics, I did what came natural: I counted and catalogued all of the appearances of "as if" in the novel, determining a frequency of more than one "as if'" per page, a truly anomalous ratio among regionalist texts and even among Jewett's other prose fiction writing. As a literary critic interested in questions of how literary structures intersect with cultural and socio-political phenomena, I began to hypothesize about what kind of narrative logic "as if" created between an urbane summer visitor to a coastal Maine town and the residents of that town. Does feeling "as if" she were an old and dear friend to Mrs. Blackett underscore the deep bonds the narrator forms with the women of the town as feminist critics such as Marjorie Pryse and Judith Fetterley suggest, or does feeling "as if" she were Mrs. Blackett's old friend constitute a consumerist fantasy in

which deep connection to simple places and simple people are all part of the vacation package, as argued by cultural historians such as Richard Brodhead and Amy Kaplan? It seemed to me that the germ of this literary debate could be found in the prevalence of syntactic structures of simile woven throughout the book and culminating in the amplified syntax of likeness in the phrase that both of these critical schools have identified as the centerpiece of the novel: the narrator's claim that she "came near to feeling like a true Bowden."

I begin with this anecdote of counting and literary criticism in order to explain how the project presented in the preceding chapters came to be. My intention was to write a dissertation that would find different quantifiable linguistic phenomena in nineteenth-century American texts and dedicate a chapter to each in which I would present my data and interpret my findings in light of current literary-critical conversations. When I turned my attention to literary dialect representations, however, a topic that already had a well established tradition of borrowing methods from linguistics to count, catalogue, and interpret textual features in support of literary-critical arguments, my hopes of a paint-by-numbers dissertation became much more complicated than I could have anticipated. Part of my problems was caused by my choice of a "dialect text." Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man* has run its readers in circles since its publication in 1857, and the more I tried to pin down the representations of Black Guinea's speech in order to analyze them, the more hornswoggled I felt. Was this Melville's honest effort to represent the speech of a mid-nineteenth-century African American, or was this his best attempt at representing the speech of a "white operator" imitating the speech of a mid-nineteenth-century African American? Given that the novel is set on a steamship, how much could I know about Black Guinea's speech community, if he were in fact, for real? What was I supposed to do with the pun in Black Guinea's plea to his inquisitors:

> "Oh, find 'em, find 'em," he earnestly added, "and let 'em come quick, and show you all, ge'mmen, dat dis poor ole darkie is werry well wordy of all you kind ge'mmen's kind confidence."

Did "wordy" represent an effort on Melville's part to show a phonological aspect of Black Guinea's speech or was it Melville playing Hamlet by suggesting that one trusts "words, words, words" at his own risk?

In many ways, however, I was blessed in trying to apply an Ivesian interpretation to a book so resistant to any form of interpretation. It dawned on me while trying to follow the models of Ives and, more recently, Lisa Minnick that these problems were not specific to *The Confidence-Man*. Narrative layers, puns, and questions about trying to determine where fictional characters came from started to reveal themselves as universal obstacles to the pursuit of using methods of counting in service of arguments about authenticity. Furthermore, the debates among linguists about the politics of transcription and about the fundamental inadequacies of phonetic alphabets and "feature lists" further eroded my confidence that I could, in fact, make counting do what I desired it to do: prove that Herman Melville was an expert dialect writer well ahead of his time. When I saw how central my own desires were to the decisions I was making about how to arrive at my data, I abandoned the effort as a wild goose chase.

Given my difficulties with the theoretical incoherencies and the methodological impasses I ran into while attempting to employ linguistic strategies in support of the particular literary-critical goal of a provable authenticity, I began to notice how much literary criticism—whether it included data or explicitly engaged linguistic studies or not—was based on confident assessments of authenticity in literary dialect. I saw assessments of linguistic authenticity deeply embedded in the stories literary critics were telling about the development of nineteenth-century American literature and in the stories that were being told about productive bridges between linguistic methods and literary

goals. It seemed to me, however, that our stories about literary dialect's place in the larger trajectories of nineteenth-century literature were unnecessarily circumscribed and that our efforts to create literary-linguistic approaches to literary dialect were unproductively driven to answer the unanswerable question posed by authenticity.

As a result, I formulated a sequence of four research questions corresponding to the four chapters included here. In my first chapter I asked, "What is the nature of the confidence game that readers intent on proving authenticity play?" In my second chapter I asked, "What effects has this confidence game had on our literary histories of the nineteenth century?" In my third chapter I asked, "What effects has this confidence game had on efforts to bring linguistics and literary criticism together to study dialect texts?" In my final chapter I asked, "How can the trials and errors of efforts to mine quantitative data from dialect texts help us to move beyond this confidence game?"

An unintended consequence of structuring my dissertation this way has been the impression among many of my readers that the first three chapters are intended to tear down all previous critical approaches to literary dialect and that the fourth fills the resulting vacuum. This is problematic for the success of my scholarship for two reasons, both which I intend to guard against in the book project that comes out of this dissertation. The first problem is that I do not want to obscure the positive literary-critical contributions that I make in the first three chapters behind my meta-critical commentary on the blindspots of previous approaches. I believe that the metaphor of the confidence game is useful in formulating discussions about how real literary representation can be and how readers have always been tempted to see dialect representations as the hard edge of realism. Such a belief opens possibilities to consider how much readers' responses to the authenticity of dialect representations in the late nineteenth century have in common

with twenty-first century debates about the authenticity of speech in television series such as *The Wire* and *Deadwood*.

I believe that critical conversations about the literary, cultural, and socio-political movements in the nineteenth-century are inestimably enriched by considering dialect texts that have been marginalized by our conventional literary histories next to those that have been placed in the center. What have we lost by using only Page, Harris, and Thomas Dixon as our representatives of racist writers of plantation fiction against which we can compare Charles Chesnutt? How would including Virginia Frazer Boyle's *Devil Tales* or Ed Mott's *Black Homer of Jimtown* in these conversations expand our points of reference for discussing Chesnutt's methods of subversion? Furthermore, I believe that efforts to include linguistic analysis in discussions of literary dialects going back at least fifty years speak to the ineffable sense that literary dialects provide readers something worth counting. It may be that standardization ratios are not the most productive results of this counting, but they model an approach that frees our counting from the problems presented by the circular logics of provable authenticity.

The second problem with the impression that the fourth chapter somehow provides the counterweight to the first three chapters' critiques is that I do not believe that criticism on literary dialect must be quantitative to be successful. Rather, I tried to show throughout my dissertation that many of the arguments that have attached to literary dialects have been framed as though some quantification had already been done. My efforts in exposing the pervasive and distracting logic of authenticity were not meant to suggest that literary critics who do not count do not count. Not only did my conclusions about the three works of plantation fiction focus primarily on narrative form, I believe that the forms of attention that the methods of producing quantitative data requires increases the opportunities for noticing passages ripe for qualitative literary and cultural

analysis. Take for example the following passage from Joel Chandler Harris's *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings*, a work which is often characterized as stories told by a former slave to a white child. This passage, in which Uncle Remus verbally spars with a "Savannah Darkey" who puts on airs in his dress, his manner, and, we might conjecture, his speech, appears hundreds of pages into the book, long after the tales of talking animals have ended:

> "Him po' country fer true," commented the Savannah negro; "he no like Sawanny. Down da, we set need de shade an' eaty de rice-bud, an' de crab, an' de swimp tree time de day; an' de buckra man drinky him wine, an' smoky him seegyar all troo de night. Plenty fer eat an' not much fer wuk."
>
> "Hit's mighty nice, I speck," responded Uncle Remus, gravely. "De nigger dat ain't hope up 'longer high feedin' ain't got no grip. But up yer whar fokes is gotter scramble 'roun' an' make der own livin', de vittles w'at's kumerlated widout enny sweatin' mos' allers gener'ly b'longs ter some yuther man by rights. One hoe- cake an' a rasher er middlin' meat las's me fum Sunday ter Sunday, an' I'm in a mighty big streak er luck w'en I gits dat."
>
> The Savannah negro here gave utterance to a loud, contemptuous laugh, and began to fumble somewhat ostentatiously with a big brass watch-chain.

While I was interested in generating data on Harris's nonstandardization ratios for my research and therefore passing over the implications of this passage, it was my effort to code the entire text that led me to a rich passage that would have otherwise been overlooked. What can we read into Harris's texturing his representations of African American speech in this way? Does this unfavorable portrayal of the "Savannah Darkey" change how, for example, Troike might read Harris as a writer of Gullah or how Jones might read the literary uses of Gullah in Hughes?

I want to close by returning to Boyle and Jewett in order to make a point that came to me late in the process of writing this dissertation: women have been treated differently as dialect writers than have men. Boyle's *Devil Tales*, given their structure as

a collection of "tales" provide perhaps a better intertext for Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman* than Thomas Dixon's novels and, given their explicit emphasis on conjure, perhaps provide a better intertext than Page's or Harris's collections of tales. Yet there are many barriers to getting Boyle into this conversation. First of all, Boyle has been largely overlooked by literary critics (with notable exception of Matt Cohen's essay "Plantation Modernism"), a fact which does not represent her prominence as a woman of letters in the last decades of the nineteenth-century and the first decades of the twentieth. Second, Boyle, is not included in the excellent *Documenting the American South* digital archive. Because I was not able to code a digital version of *Devil Tales* isomorphic with those of Page, Harris, and Chesnutt, I left Boyle out of my quantitative study in my fourth chapter. The fact is that digital archives are just as susceptible to blind spots as are traditional literary-critical projects; it was the difficulty in bringing Boyle into my fourth chapter that revealed to me how sparse studies of "serious" women dialect writers were. I made the point that the Civil War made a dividing line between which texts were given serious linguistic attention, but, with the exception of Zora Neale Hurston who is anomalous as a dialect writer for many reasons, it is rare to find literary-linguistic studies focused on women writers of dialect.

If we return to the critical discussion of Sarah Orne Jewett that I began with, we might ask if there is anything that might be gained by taking her seriously as a dialect writer by determining how nonstandard she lets her representations of Dunnet Landing speech get. In doing so, might we test one possible way in which hers was, as Pryse and Fetterley suggest, a different kind of regionalism? It does not undercut the arguments of either Pryse and Fetterley or Brodhead and Kaplan if we look for quantitative ways to articulate the lines they draw between and among regionalist texts. Instead, by making our literary-critical questions occasionally digital and quantitative and by always

interpreting our digital and quantitative results through literary-critical lenses we can enrich the best traditions of literary scholarship, challenge assumptions that have grown stale, and collaborate on developing new approaches to the ways that literary forms intersect with the social, political, and cultural contexts from which they come.

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